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**The Yazoo Library Association's significance in history: The  
American social and public library movements in the South**

**Buchanan, William Emory, Ed.D.**

**The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1992**

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THE YAZOO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION'S SIGNIFICANCE IN  
HISTORY: THE AMERICAN SOCIAL AND PUBLIC  
LIBRARY MOVEMENTS IN THE SOUTH

by

William Emory Buchanan

A Dissertation Submitted to  
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Approved by

  
Dissertation Adviser

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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BUCHANAN, WILLIAM EMORY, Ed.D. The Yazoo Library Association's Significance in History: The American Social and Public Library Movements in the South. (1992) Directed by Dr. Charles Achilles, 199 pages.

The social library movement was a predecessor of the public library movement in the United States. It was primarily a nineteenth century phenomenon and is generally considered to have laid the foundations for the public library movement that developed around the turn of the century. The ascendent historical scholarship suggests that the movement was primarily a phenomenon of New England and the Midwest, with the South making insignificant contributions.

The Yazoo Library Association in Yazoo City, Mississippi, was established as a social library in 1838, and it is still functioning today (1992) as a social library which contracts with local governments to provide public library services. Despite the fact that it was founded during what one library historian refers to as the "golden age" of social libraries and despite the fact that its founding and continued existence as a social library has been documented in local and regional publications, it has never been acknowledged or documented in the national literature of library history.

The purpose of this dissertation is to document formally this library's existence as a social library and to analyze its importance in the larger scheme of American public library history. This was accomplished through

historical and biographical analysis of the Yazoo Library Association. Data were collected in a case study using both biography and historical analysis of social libraries and their founders that have been previously documented in the literature of American public library history.

The study revealed that the Yazoo Library Association is a social library as defined in the canons of American library history and that it is a part of a larger pattern of social library development in the South that has never been systematically documented.

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

"The Past is never dead. It's not even past."  
William Faulkner (1951) said it in Requiem for a Nun (p. 92). Willie Morris was so impressed by it that he quoted it in print at least twice, in North Toward Home (1967) and in the introduction he wrote for Yazoo: Its Legends and Legacies (DeCell & Pritchard, 1976, p. xi). It was true when Faulkner said it; it was true when Morris said it; and it is true now. I am reminded of this when I go to church and am surrounded by the saints of the early church who float in an ethereal cloud that we call stained glass windows. I am reminded of this when I help a student who is struggling with some long-dead but ever-present author such as Homer or Shakespeare. And I am reminded of this when I enter a library and feel the tug of a thousand different writers whose voices will never be stilled. No, the past is not dead; it is very much with us. And libraries are one of those magical estuaries where the past, the present, and the future come together. It is one thing to know this intellectually. It is quite another to experience it. The knowledge transcends location; but the experience has to occur somewhere specifically. One of the places that it

occurs is in the Ricks Memorial Library in Yazoo City, Mississippi. Morris has written of such experiences in his various autobiographical volumes. In his introduction to Yazoo: Its Legends and Legacies, he anticipates how others in some future years may come to experience the library. He envisions a point in the future when some young boy or girl will be "sitting in a corner of the old Ricks library on Main Street, as I once did, discovering on its shelves as if by accident the lost voices, the patina of time which envelopes this ground of half hills and delta..."(p. xi). This dissertation is about that library and about its parent organization, the Yazoo Library Association. However, to truly understand the significance of this study one must first understand a bit about the historiography of the public library movement in the United States and its antecedent, the social library movement.

#### BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The public library movement in the United States was preceded by and grew out of an association or subscription library movement. Library historians have noted that these libraries, also known as social libraries, were usually composed of fee-paying members who affiliated for the purpose of sharing bibliographic resources and exchanging ideas. In this latter regard the social libraries often had adjunct debating societies and lyceums. Funds collected from the members were used for the purchase of books

selected by the members. While some libraries did have selection policies or formulae, book selection generally tended to be less formal and reflected the reading interests and habits of those who purchased the books.

Historians note that social libraries tended to grow up in areas that were economically stable enough to allow for such leisure time pursuits and where there was sufficient intellectual vitality. Benjamin Franklin is credited with establishing the prototype social library in Philadelphia in 1731. The popular view among historians has been that the social library movement came later (if at all) to the South than to other parts of the country (i.e., the North and the Midwest) and that, consequently, it was of less historic importance. As an extension of this argument, the same historians contend that the public library movement was also a late bloomer in the South. In his History of Libraries in the Western World, Elmer D. Johnson (1965) notes that "Public library beginnings were more numerous and growth was more steady in the Northeast, Middle West and Far West, with the South, Great Plains and Mountain states slower in following the lead" (p. 364). Sidney H. Ditzion (1947) is even less charitable about the South's contributions to the social and public library movements. Writing in Arsenals of a Democratic Culture (a reworking of his 1945 Columbia University dissertation) he notes that "the backwardness of the South in establishing libraries was attributed to the

aristocratic tradition; it was unmistakably true that that section of our nation was slow in learning the democratic principles of cooperation for education purposes" (1947, p. 72).

Antecedent to these two historians is Jesse H. Shera (1949) whose Foundations of the Public Library (a reworking of his 1944 University of Chicago dissertation) is considered a classic in American library history. It is often cited as evidence that the social library movement was a phenomenon mainly of the Northeast.

However true such statements by Shera, Johnson, Ditzion, et al. may be as generalizations, they hardly take account of significant exceptions to the general conditions and have had a tendency to discourage other research that might show these so-called "exceptions" to be a part of a larger pattern of social library development that has never been documented.

The library in Yazoo City, Mississippi appears to be one such significant exception. The library was founded in 1838 by the Yazoo Library Association, placing it within the time-frame identified by Shera (1949) as the "Golden Age" (1790-1840) of social library development in the U.S. (p. 69). The Yazoo Library went into abeyance during the Civil War but was reactivated in 1871. The year 1901 was another watershed; this was the year that the new beaux arts building Mrs. Fanny J. Ricks had funded as a memorial to her



husband was completed to house the library. The library continued to operate as a social or subscription library until 1963 when it became a public library. (NOTE: The library is still technically an association library. However, the Association contracts with Yazoo City and County to provide public library services, and a patron does not have to be a member of the association in order to use the library. In today's bureaucratic nomenclature it is what would be called a quasi-public agency.)

#### **Purpose and Significance of Study**

The purpose of this dissertation is two fold. First, it will chronicle the history of the library within the context of American library history. While historians have recorded in great number the histories of social libraries in the Northeast and Midwest, they have recorded only a paltry number for the South. An analysis of the entries in the "Predecessors of the Public Library" chapter in Donald G. Davis and John Mark Tucker's (1989) American Library History: A Comprehensive Guide to the Literature (pp. 60-73) reveals that 167 of the cited items are about libraries in the Northeast or Midwest, while only 27 are about Southern libraries. The Yazoo Library is not among these 27, even though several historic articles have been written about it, including one by former director David Woodburn in Mississippi Libraries. So that, at a minimum, one goal of this dissertation is to correct the balance sheet for those

who are interested in history-by-the-numbers. Another goal is to provide a building block which some future historian can use in writing the full history of Southern library development

The Yazoo library today is a healthy, vital institution that is heavily used by the residents of the city and county. The second purpose of this dissertation is to examine in some detail the administrative history of the library in the latter part of the 20th century and chronicle the evolution of the leadership that successfully steered the library through the desegregation turmoil of the 1960's and the economic downturns of recent years. This is accomplished primarily through a biographical analysis of the current directory and the immediate past director.

#### Methodology

The study begins with a literature review during which generalized conditions of library development in the nation as well as generalized conditions of library development in the South are discussed. In both cases attention is given to the intellectual and cultural environments giving rise to library development.

Based on this literature review, common denominators of healthy library growth (e.g., economic affluence, community stability, intellectual curiosity) are identified and a profile is developed against which the Yazoo library can be measured and evaluated. Secondary sources are used to

establish the prototype and primary and secondary sources are used in analyzing the Yazoo library in light of this prototype. The analysis focuses on the 1830's, the era during which the Yazoo library came into being.

The point of this analysis is to establish the larger framework -- the developing national library community -- of which the Yazoo library is a part and to determine if the claims of Shera, Ditzion, and others are applicable in this particular case.

In an effort to understand the roots of the Yazoo library a prosopographical study of its founding members is undertaken. Local histories as well as details from local newspapers are used to construct this group profile. The purpose of such an approach is to understand the characteristics and character traits of the group which created the institution. The study specifically attempts to identify the most significant traits of individuals who made a decision to participate in the library association e.g., economic status, profession, educational level, and so forth. To the extent possible, this aspect of the study considers the intellectual concerns of the members. The purpose of such prosopography is to establish points of comparison between Yazoo and other social libraries identified by Shera, Ditzion, et al.

The historic book collection in the library's museum room, which represents the remains of the library's

collecting activity between 1838 and 1901, and extant catalogs from the nineteenth century were evaluated against the collections of other social libraries to determine the extent to which the Yazoo library followed national trends. This procedure showed the extent to which the library and its patrons shared the intellectual concerns of the nation and to what extent they developed intellectual interests of a more local and regional nature.

The library Minutes, which have been maintained from the founding meeting forward, were used in conjunction with local newspapers to establish a chronology. Dates of entries in the Minutes were used as access points to locally published newspapers so that library-related events could be correlated with goings-on in Yazoo City and the larger world. The idea here is to understand the library's evolution in relation to developments in the world around it. Among events considered in some detail in this section are the library's change from private to public in 1963, the impact that this had on the institution, and the reaction of the community to integration.

Linda Crawford, the current librarian, and Harriett DeCell, the immediate past librarian, were interviewed to develop professional biographies that were used 1) as additional material with which to construct a history of the library and 2) (as already mentioned) as a means of interpreting and evaluating the administrative history of

the library in the latter part of the 20th century. (NOTE: Harriet's last name is now Kuykendall; however, during her tenure as director of Ricks Memorial Library her last name was DeCell. For the purposes of simplification, the latter name will be used throughout.) These two individuals were selected as biographees because of their long involvement with the library. Linda Crawford was originally trained as an archeologist and museum director and had been director of the local historical museum for 10 years prior to becoming librarian, so that she has observed the library from at least two important vantage points over a number of years. Harriet DeCell moved to Yazoo City in the late 40's and has been involved with the library every since -- as a teacher bringing her students to do research, as a volunteer in the summer reading program, as the wife of a board member and then as a board member in her own right, as director of the library, and, finally, as a volunteer in her retirement years. So her observations are multi-faceted and far ranging.

### Findings

The study of the Yazoo City library produced a picture of an institution that tracks in almost all respects the development of social libraries in other parts of the nation. The study showed that the Yazoo library of the nineteenth century was a microcosm of American library development, and its emergence -- atypical though it may

have been for its geographical location -- was no accident, but was the result of specific planning on the part of the library's leaders who modeled their institution after the somewhat elitist libraries of the Northeast.

The prosopographical study of the library's early leadership revealed a group of powerful and well-to-do gentlemen (businessmen and planters) who were leaders of the Yazoo community and whose political influence was felt as far away as Jackson, where the state legislature was enough under their influence to be persuaded to allocate funds for the operation of the library. It also demonstrated that the city's strong commercial, manufacturing, and shipping interests (it was an inland port) connected it with thriving commercial centers of the Northeast and Midwest and Europe, and that these trade routes gave rise to commercial as well as intellectual exchange. These cultural and business relationships are further suggested by the city's strong whig orientation.

The study suggests that innate intellectual curiosity, spurred by contact with the wider world, and fueled by a relatively strong economy, gave rise to the Yazoo Library Association. Not surprisingly, the library originally reflected the exclusivity of its founding fathers. This resulted in its maintaining its private status well into the 20th century. The national movement from social to public libraries was a part of the democratization of knowledge

inspired by the belief that an informed populace would better ensure the republic. The Yazoo library eventually yielded to this larger destiny and became a public library in the fullest meaning of the term -- it became a library for all people.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

When one is dealing with a historical dissertation there is a sense in which one can make the argument that all that has gone before has -- to some extent, anyway -- influenced the eventual look of the end product. Carl Becker makes this point very tellingly in his methodological essay, "Everyman His Own Historian." Originally presented as his inaugural address as president of the American Historical Association, the essay points out that every person uses events in his or her past as a basis for making decisions in the present. We remember that we used the last bit of milk for our cereal this morning before we went to work; on the way home from work we review immediate past events, focus on the fact that we have exhausted our milk supply, and make the decision to stop by the supermarket on the way home to purchase a fresh supply. It may be that we also read a book last night, but in terms of establishing today's priorities, what is most important is the fact that we have no milk. When this process occurs, we are acting as historians of our personal past. In the same sense that we are historians of our personal past, the historian is called upon to evaluate our corporate past. In doing this the historian will, of necessity, view history from a personal



perspective and will select facts to make an interpretation. When this happens "the past becomes an integral and living part of our present world of semblance" (p. 242) This is putting rather a fine point on the matter, but it does serve to provide a scholarly framework within which to assert that the roots of this dissertation are planted very deeply within the author's personal experiences as a preschool library user, as a student, as a working librarian. I eventually came to librarianship by reviewing my life's past events and determining that many of my most pleasant experiences had occurred in small public libraries. These small public libraries provided quiet protected places where one could read until sated; they provided a treasure house of books in which one could browse and discover new authors; they provided endless opportunities for vicarious adventures; and, when it was time to go home, the librarian sent the reader away with arms full of the best of the day's discoveries. When, at middle age, the need was felt to change careers, these recalled experiences provided the courage to venture forth into the world of libraries; after all, it was a world which had once felt comfortable and welcoming.

Likewise, when I came to write this dissertation, I did not conduct a dispassionate search to determine -- in a vacuum, as it were -- what intellectual problems were available for solving. No, once again I reached back into a

very personal past and identified a topic that met the research criterion of being an unexplored intellectual area in need of examination but which, at the same time, resonated to my own existential needs.

So, in company with Carl Becker, the writer asserts that his life experiences inform this dissertation and inform the reading of the secondary literature hereinafter discussed. This personal history, it seems to me, is an appropriate part of the literature that forms the foundation for this dissertation.

Let us now look for a moment at some of the specific pieces of literature that inform this work. This literature is of three varieties:

1. Literature related to the methods of historical research and interpretative biography.
2. Literature related to the history of Yazoo City and its environs.
3. Literature related to the history of social libraries in the United States.

#### Methods of Historical/Biographical Research

One of the classic works in historical methodology is The Modern Researcher by Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff (1977). Among its many virtues, the book emphasizes the importance of the scholar in converting lifeless records into living stories of the past. "Without the experiencing mind, the searcher after truth cannot bridge the gap between

the lived occurrence and the dusty record" (p. 42). When history is really done well, says Barzun and Graff, it becomes like "a second life extended indefinitely into the dark backward and abysm of time..." It is, they conclude, "a vicarious experience" (p. 45).

The Barzun and Graff book is rich in both how-to and theory. It provides practical advice on identifying a topic, collecting data, researching, and writing. Intertwined with the practical advice are theoretical discussions on the nature, value, and uses of history. In justifying the existence of the discipline, for example, Barzun and Graff offer the following: "For a whole society to lose its sense of history would be tantamount to giving up its civilization. We live and are moved by historical ideas and images, and our national existence goes on by reproducing them" (p. 9). History, then, is essential for understanding who we are.

In his 1989 monograph, Interpretive Biography, Norman Denzin suggests that biography, like history, is not static but is shaped by context. Just as a progressive historian will gladly recount the Civil War in all its gore and grime for the purpose of demonstrating that we have now "progressed" beyond that point and the consensus historian will downplay the Civil War in his efforts to iron out conflict, so too the biographer (or autobiographer) will vary his story depending on the point being made and the

audience for whom it is made. He further suggests that lives, like history, have critical points that provide foci for understanding them. The historian refers to such pivotal points as "watersheds;" Denzin refers to them as "objective markers" and that "these markers reflect key, critical points about the life in question" (p. 19). The approach of the biographer, then, is much like the approach of the historian; the biographer identifies the critical points that give the landscape meaning and then builds a story that explains those points in context.

Denzin's book grows out of the so-called "New Left" school of historical and biographical writing which attempts to focus attention on the ordinary or overlooked persons of history. It has been from this perspective that much of women's history and black history and the other categorical forms of history have been written. Prior to the "New Left," histories tended to be written from the top down; that is they were written with the dominant historical figures as their reference points. Consequently, you have the history of "Jacksonian America" or "Elizabethan England" or the "Age of Napoleon." The approach of the New Left is history from the bottom up, that is from the point of view of the individuals who made up Tudor England. Denzin suggests that biography is important for its own sake, but it is also important in that individual biographies create building blocks that add to our total understanding of the

larger fabric of the human experience in history.

Also pointing out the value of such biographical building blocks is Catherine C. Mitchell (1990), a historian of American journalism. In her essay, "The Place of Biography in the History of News Women," Mitchell cites the work of women's historian Gerda Lerner in calling for more biographical work. She holds up a four-tier model developed by Lerner as her justification for this call. The first tier is *compensatory*, that is biography that establishes that real people actually existed; the way that is established is by telling the story of those people. The second tier is *contributory*, that is telling the story of the contributions those persons have made. The next tier is *transitional* and is the point at which one looks at the literature created so far to determine if it suggests new categories of understanding that previous models have ignored e.g., do the accumulating texts on women in history begin to suggest that child bearing and child rearing have more of an influence on the fabric of history than has been suggested by the older forms of historical writing. The final tier is *integrative* wherein one begins to incorporate the alternative history that has been developed into established historical canons so that what emerges is a new understanding of history. While Mitchell's work is in the discipline of journalism, there is nothing to deter its being applied in the discipline of library science.

Harvard Guide to American History edited by Frank Freidel (1974) is an invaluable handbook and bibliography. Not only does it provide succinct essays on the research and writing of history, it also provides a detailed bibliography of the standard works in every conceivable category of United States history. There is a very instructive section on manuscript analysis with directions on deciphering antique scripts and converting antiquated references to money and dates into understandable quantities.

Two invaluable bibliographic works are American Library History: A Bibliography of Dissertations and Theses by Arthur P. Young (1988) and American Library History: A Comprehensive Guide to the Literature by Donald G. Davis and John Mark Tucker (1989). The first provides an exhaustive listing of all theses and dissertations in the field up until 1987. The scope of the work goes outside library science per se to include dissertations and theses on library history written in schools of education and departments of history as well as schools of library science. Each of the citations are individually annotated. The second work, written in 1989, provides historiographical essays on the major divisions of American library history followed by unannotated citations. Although the citations are not annotated, the authors discuss the major works in the historiographical essays. Both of these works have been extremely useful in locating information relevant to the

present work.

#### Literature of Yazoo County and Environs

Any discussion of the history of Yazoo City or County must, of necessity, include Yazoo: Its Legends and Legacies by Harriet DeCell and JoAnne Pritchard (1976). The book is about what is to all appearances just another dying Southern town -- one of those regional agricultural centers that has been slowly drying up since the interstates came along and usurped the roles of river and rail.

To tell their story, the authors reach all the way back into Yazoo's prehistoric past to find the threads for weaving a history that lifts the little town out of its mundane present and into the realm of the historically important. The message is clear: Yazoo City may no longer be of pivotal importance in the region, but it was once the unofficial capitol of the Yazoo Delta.

The book does what so many local histories attempt but never achieve -- it takes the local community and universalizes its story, so that the book is not just the story of Yazoo County and its denizens. It is the story of Mississippi; it is the story of America; it is the story of the world in which we live. Told in this manner, the book is not just a collection of unrelated genealogies as so many local histories are. It is a story of humankind that transcends place and time. \_The writing of such a book was in many ways an outgrowth of Harriet's years in the

classroom. She and JoAnne Pritchard, with whom she was to write the book, had taught an integrated humanities course at Yazoo High which spanned three years and covered all aspects of the arts and humanities, including music, art, literature, history, and religion. The course was taught in units, each of which was introduced with some sort of audio-visual for the purposes of framing the subject which was to be considered in detail over the next few days or weeks. The audio-visuals were usually films, slides, or audio tapes which depicted great works of art or music or some other aspect of the culture under consideration. On one occasion, however, Harriet decided to introduce the unit with slides of the girl scout troop she had sponsored for years. The pictures she chose had -- by intention -- a number of pictures of girls who were currently in her class. On the day of the show the class had no idea what was planned. "I got out my slides of that class and ran them with the same kind of commentary we had used before, except this time it was tongue in cheek," DeCell explained during a 1991 interview with the researcher. At the end of school students were given the opportunity to evaluate the class and comment on it. One student whose picture had been used in the slide show, specifically made reference to this class and said, "this was the first time I ever realized I was a part of history," continued DeCell.



Written about the same time as the DeCell book, John Skates' Mississippi: A Bicentennial History provides a quick look at Mississippi history. All the facts are there; it is well indexed; and it is easy to read. It provides an easily accessible framework within which to understand the story of the Yazoo Library Association.

The work of Willie Morris, a Yazoo City native, is very valuable in documenting the local color and atmosphere in which the area is so rich. Particularly helpful is North Toward Home, a book of memoirs in which he recalls growing up in Yazoo City. The book stands in a long tradition of memoir literature in Mississippi which includes William Alexander Percy's (1941) Lanterns on the Levy: Recollections of a Planter's Son and Hodding Carter's 1953 book, Where Main Street Meets the River.

Though national in scope, Richard Hofstadter's (1955) The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R. provides a framework for analyzing the social and economic forces that were driving late nineteenth and early twentieth century America. Hofstadter contends that the rise of big business disrupted established society, particular the legal, medical, and religious professions, whose position at the top of the social pyramid were eclipsed by the rapidly ascending barons of business. He contends that this disruption caused the major professions (medicine, law, etc.) to regroup and form associations for their own

protection. This regrouping and association forming was not restricted to the so-called major professions; it also occurred in education, librarianship, and other areas. Hofstadter calls this process the "status revolution" (p. 135). Progressivism, an outgrowth of this social foment, was an attempt by politicians and the leaders of the professions to exert control over big business and, through legislation, make it accountable for its actions. One of the results of this interaction among big business, the professions, and the government was the rise of philanthropy among the leaders of big business, including such men as Andrew Carnegie.

#### Literature of Social and Public Library History and Administration

As a beginning point for the discussion of the literature of social and public library history, it is perhaps instructive to examine a piece of literature that parallels one of the cornerstones of social library historiography and which, in its own right, will inform the subject from a different angle.

In 1890 Frederick Jackson Turner -- a brilliant but relatively unknown American historian -- was elected president of the American Historical Association. In that same year the United States Bureau of the Census, declared that settlements had so permeated the hitherto unsettled areas that there could no longer be said that a frontier

existed between civilized and uncivilized lands. In short, this nation no longer had a frontier; it no longer had a wild, untamed west (Turner, 1962, p. 39). Recognizing a watershed when he saw one, Turner seized upon this epochal fact and built his presidential address to the Association around it. Titled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Turner's address (later published as a monograph) sought to interpret American history in light of the frontier. Essentially, Turner argued that the frontier had acted as a release valve for the nation, that it had offered persons behind the frontier line in civilization a place to escape and start over if they needed to. The frontier also served as a purging and a forging ground where old world values were melted down and hammered into a new world ethic. The frontier, with its rigorous lifestyle, was also a proving ground for the American male.

Turner's speech, delivered to an audience heavily populated by scientific historians who had studied under Leopold Von Ranke, went through the profession like a shot from a cannon. Basically an interpretative essay, Turner's speech sought not to introduce new facts but to come to a new understanding of the existing ones. Turner's emphasis was on the interpretation of facts, while the Von Ranke proteges contended that the facts speak for themselves. Becker (1935) later observed that

To establish the facts is always in order, and is indeed the first duty of the historian; but to suppose that the facts, once established, in all their fulness, will 'speak for themselves' is an illusion of those historians of the last century who found some special magic in the word 'scientific.' The scientific historian, it seems, was one who set forth the facts without injecting any extraneous meaning into them...Left to themselves, the facts do not speak; left to themselves, they do not exist, not really, since for all practical purposes there is no fact until someone affirms it (pp. 249-251).

Today, more than 100 years removed from Turner's ringing pronouncements, historians are still reacting, with one school of historians attempting to prove his thesis and another attempting to disprove it.

Jesse Shera stands somewhat in the same relationship with American library history as Turner did to the larger field of American history. In his groundbreaking study, Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855, Shera (1949) argued that the social library movement, which was begun by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia, was the cornerstone of public libraries in America. In their bibliographic survey of the field, Davis and Tucker (1988) refer to the work as "the standard treatment of the rise of social libraries in the United States." (p. 56).

Shera's work is undeniably important. It is the first major attempt to synthesize the body of literature on social

library history. There had been numerous monographs on social library history published prior to the Shera work; however, they had typically been chronologies of individual social libraries or of social libraries within a tightly prescribed area. Well researched and extremely well written, Foundations of the Public Library is a cornerstone of the history of both the social and public library movements in America.

Like all good histories, Shera's work grows out of a thesis which the author orchestrates his information to prove. Shera's thesis is that social libraries created the conditions for the eventual evolution of public libraries in ways that other types of libraries (e.g., parish libraries, private libraries, Sunday School libraries) had not and that the social library movement and the early stages of the public library movement were primarily the intellectual offspring of New England.

New England, Shera continued, provided the necessary bedrock because of its homogenous society, a society populated primarily by persons of English descent. Further, the society was insulated from other parts of the country by two important reasons: natural boundaries (e.g., mountains, rivers, etc.) and by the inhospitability of the land. Included in this last reason was obviously the weather. However, also included in it was the rockiness and low fertility rate of the soil. These last two factors resulted

in there being considerable migration out from the area but little migration into it. It was, in short, an insular and very stable society. This insularity and stability combined with the traditions of education and learning brought with the inhabitants from England provided fertile ground for the idea of social libraries to germinate.

In Thomas Bray's Grand Design, Charles T. Laughler (1973) makes a strong case for Bray, an Anglican clergyman in Colonial America, having been the real father of American public librarianship because the system of parish libraries he established provided a prototype for today's public libraries. However, Shera discounts any relationship between Bray's libraries and the development of public libraries in America. The fact is that the Bray libraries, which were almost all Southern, simply did not fit into the hegemonic role Shera was establishing for the public libraries of New England.

Sidney Ditzion (1947) echoes many of Shera's contentions in his Arsenals of a Democratic Culture, although he does expand the scope of his study to include not just New England but the Middle Atlantic states as well. Ditzion also focuses more attention on the social reform dimension of the nineteenth-century library movement. Like Shera, Ditzion identifies the Northeast as having paved the way in public library development and dismisses the South with only one sentence:

The backwardness of the South in establishing libraries was attributed to the aristocratic tradition; it was unmistakably true that that section of our nation was slow in learning the democratic principles of cooperation for education purposes (p. 72).

The book includes a highly useful section on philanthropy in which the author examines the motivations of a number of well-known library philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie, John Jacob Astor, and James Lenox, and concludes (in a Progressive vein) that it grew out of a belief in the improvability of humankind through the development of enlightening and morally edifying agencies such as libraries and schools.

Though he does not address the issue of social libraries, Michael Harris (1975), in his brief study, The Role of the Public Library in American Life: A Speculative Essay, uses prosopography as a tool for examining the motivations of the founders of public libraries. While Harris admits that the founders did see public libraries as means of creating a more literate population, he contends that they also saw the libraries as a means of stabilizing and controlling society. Both the educational function and the stabilizing function are seen by Harris as a means of enhancing the environment for business and industry.

In his essay, "Cultural Activities in the Twentieth Century," Mississippi historian Joseph C. Kiger (1973) considers the development of library services in the state

and finds that, in the absence of a government-funded public library system, social libraries were still be found late in the nineteenth century. Even after the founding of the Mississippi Library Commission in the late 1920s, a portion of the state's library services continued to be provided by social libraries.

In her 1982 dissertation, Victoria Kline Musmann challenges many of the assumptions upon which the work of both Shera and Ditzion are based. Her point of challenge is from a feminist perspective. Both Shera and Ditzion contend that social library development had been primarily a phenomenon of the Northeast and Midwest and that it had been male dominated. In Women and the Founding of Social Libraries in California, 1859-1910, Musmann demonstrated that there was considerable social library development beyond the articulated territory and that women had been very instrumental in bringing it about. She identifies the Women's Christian Temperance Union organization as the locus for much of the social library development. Ditzion had dismissed the WCTU's contributions as insignificant, and Musmann contends that in doing so he was being "blatantly hostile toward the WCTU" (p. 3). She contends that both he and Shera made sweeping statements about their theses without empirical data to back them up and that the time is "long overdue" (p.3) for an accurate appraisal of American library history.



Haynes McMullen's (1988) essay, The Founding of Social and Public Libraries in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois Through 1850, provides an excellent summary of the social, economic, and political conditions that gave rise to the development of social libraries. Studying the printed and manuscript sources of social libraries in the area, he has developed a profile of the ideal conditions under which social libraries developed. These conditions include a recently settled area, healthy business cycles, enabling legislation, and the presence of lyceums. This is a valuable document in understanding the preconditions for social library development.

In his brief survey of library development in North Carolina, Wendell W. Smiley (1971) documents the existence of public library services in North Carolina in 1700. This was the parish library established by Anglican clergyman Thomas Bray in Bath, NC.

Smiley's work, though it is incomplete (he acknowledges in the preface to the monograph that it is the prospectus for a dissertation that he never completed), is valuable in that it provides additional evidence of early library development in the South. He also notes that from 1760 to 1770 there was a "public library" in Wilmington "supported by a society of gentlemen" (1971, p. 70). Smiley also documents social library development in Mecklenburg and Rowan Counties.

Edwin Wiley (1909), writing in History of the Literary and Intellectual Life of the South, presents a considerably different picture of southern library development than do Ditzion and Shera. In a chapter titled "Libraries in the Southern States," he notes that the Charleston Library Society, a social library, was founded in 1748, just a few years following Benjamin Franklin's founding of the Philadelphia Library Company. He surveys public (including social), private, and academic libraries, and asserts that Thomas Jefferson, a southerner,

was the father of library science, for he was unquestionably the first in this country to arrange an extensive collection of books according to a scheme of classification (p. 490).

Wiley also credits Thomas Bray with having made the "first endeavor to institute public libraries in America, (p. 490)" and that effort, he said, was undertaken almost exclusively in the South.

There are numerous histories of individual social libraries from which can be derived the types of persons who traditionally founded and participated in social libraries. A good example is Albert Annett's (1896) essay, "The Social Library in Jaffrey" published in Dedication of the Clay Library Building at East Jaffrey, New Hampshire. The book, a souvenir publication on the occasion of the town dedicating a new library, traces the history of the

association that formed the original library. The listing is remarkably similar to that found in Yazoo City, indicating as it does merchants, planters, ministers, and lawyers.

Several other historical works inform this work by providing general background information. Most important among these are Mary E. Anders' (1958) The Development of Public Library Services in the Southeastern States, 1895-1950, a doctoral dissertation at Columbia University, and Jeannine L. Laughlin's (1983) The Mississippi Library Commission: A Force for Library Development, a doctoral dissertation at Indiana University. Anders' work chronicles the rather slow start the public library movement got in the South. She discusses the importance of local organizations such as women's clubs in developing library services. She also discusses the impact of the Carnegie endowments in the construction of library buildings. However, she does not address the issue of the public library's predecessors. Laughlin's work compliments the Anders work in that it details the importance of the Mississippi Library Commission in the development of the state's public library system.

A basic reference in public library administration is Carlton Rochell's (1891) Wheeler and Goldhor's Practical Administration of Public Libraries. The prefix on the title derives from the fact that this is a "completely revised" edition of the classic text by Joseph L. Wheeler and Herbert

Goldhor. The book clearly articulates the goals and objectives of public libraries as well as identifying specific means of accomplishing them. Rochell emphasizes the need to communicate with the community the library is designed to serve. He specifies a means of implementing such communication that has the familiar ring of classic communication and problem solving models in education:

1. Assess community and library environment.
2. Determine the role of public library in the community.
3. Evaluate current library resources and services.
4. Establish goals, objectives, and priorities.
5. Prepare and describe plans for action; activities to be carried out to meet and fulfill objectives.
6. Prepare performance measures of objective fulfillment (p. 20).

A recurring theme in the recent history of the Yazoo Library Association is the need for effective communication between the library and its various patron groups. In analyzing this process the author has found Charles Achilles three-tiered model extremely useful. The model, articulated by Wayson et al. (1988), in Handbook for Developing Public Confidence in Schools, identifies the following three levels of communication as basic to good community relations:

1. Cognitive, which involves the one-way transfer of information.
2. Affective, which involves two-way communication and is designed to generate support for the idea being communicated.
3. Conative, which involves two-way communication designed to prompt the targeted audience to become

actively involved on behalf of the idea.

The Wayson work, co-authored with Charles Achilles and several other educational administration scholars, emphasizes that good communication skills are essential if the leaders of an institution wish to develop confidence among the institution's patrons. The Wayson work proved very helpful in analyzing the communications ability of the current and previous library directors.

## CHAPTER III

## METHODOLOGY

Within the field of research there are two broad areas, quantitative and qualitative. The first is concerned with the measurement of phenomena, the second with the description and analysis of phenomena. In fact, research is seldom purely one or the other. Before the quantitative researcher begins his measurement, he must first review the literature related to his subject, and this process of review -- of assessing the value of what has gone before -- is, in fact, qualitative. Likewise, when the qualitative researcher undertakes a project, it is rare that he does not at some point have occasion to quantify data, even if it is only counting the measures in a piece of music or enumerating the cantos in a poem. However, the label is affixed based on the primary thrust of the researcher, and in this case the primary thrust will be qualitative. The focus of this research is be the Yazoo (Mississippi) Library Association and the library it founded in the early nineteenth century; the library is still functioning today as the city's public library. The point of the research is to demonstrate that, contrary to the standard works in American library history, the social library movement of the

19th century (a precursor of the public library movement of the 20th century) was not a phenomenon of only the Northeast and Midwest, but also an important movement in the South. This is accomplished primarily through historical analysis and is augmented by biographical studies of recent library directors as a means of shedding light on the library's continuing vitality.

For this project quantitative research is rejected because most quantitative research models require that one be able to isolate and manipulate variables in a way which cannot be easily accomplished outside the present. When one is dealing with the past one is dealing with *faits accomplis*; what has happened has happened, and what remains is to discover the facts and interpret them. This is not to say that historical data cannot be quantified; indeed, it can. In the Modern Researcher, Barzun and Graff (1977) note that Cliometrics is an emerging field in historic research which attempts to bring statistical methodology to bear on historic questions by subjecting existing statistical data (e.g., the 1860 census) to computer manipulation. But such methods alone, contend the researchers, do not constitute history or historical research; they are, at best, an augmentation to the historian's time-honored analytical procedures.

Most quantitative research relies on the ability to interact with research subjects in the present. One of the

classic quantitative research methodologies in education -- one borrowed from the pure sciences -- is experimental research. In this methodology, one has at least two groups, an experimental group and a control group, with the experimental group receiving some treatment that is withheld from the control group. In medicine, for instance, this might involve one group of sufferers from a chronic disease receiving a new experimental drug, while the control group receives a placebo. The point of the research would be to observe the results of the administration of the experimental drug. In education, such experimentation might take the form of one class continuing to receive traditional instruction while another class of similar students in a similar setting is exposed to a new teaching method. At the end of the year the two classes are given the same battery of achievement tests to determine which teaching method has been most effective. However, since the cause and effect relationship is not as easily measured in a social setting as it is in a clinical setting, the researcher might opt to have several control groups and several experimental groups and average the results from each to get a more accurate picture of what the cause and effect relationship really is. This is experimental testing in its scientific and social scientific settings as defined by Natalie L. Sproull in The Handbook of Research Methods (1988). Best and Kahn (1989) describe the method this way in Research in Education:



"Experimental research describes what will be when certain variables are carefully controlled or manipulated. The focus is on variable relationships. As defined here, deliberate manipulation is always a part of the experimental method" (p. 24). The problem in using such a method in historical research is that one cannot interact with the subjects to create control and experimental groups; one can only interact with the materials -- the documents -- which the individual left.

In "Everyman His Own Historian," Becker (1935) points out the futility of ever trying to prove anything historically in the sense that a scientist can prove things in a laboratory.

No doubt throughout all past time there actually occurred a series of events which, whether we know what it was or not, constitutes history in some ultimate sense. Nevertheless, much the greater part of these events we can know nothing about, not even that they occurred; many of them we can know only imperfectly; and even the few events that we think we know for sure we can never be absolutely certain of, since we can never revive them, never observe or test them directly (P. 233).

Parenthetically, the quantitative/qualitative issue brings up the whole question of whether history should properly be considered one of the humanities or one of the social sciences. There is no consistency among universities that divide the curriculum into sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Some place it in social sciences, while

others place it in the humanities. The question turns, it seems, on how one approaches the field. Some schools of history place more emphasis on economics and other quantitative determinators. For these, the bottom line is frequently arrived at through some numerical manipulation; like the sciences and social sciences, these schools of history attempt to prove their theses empirically. Among these are the Annales and the Marxist historians. Other schools of history are more concerned with the "big picture," with the weight of evidence, and with the literary skill with which the material is presented. For historians in these schools, the method of research involves acquainting themselves with the literature of a subject well enough to be able to identify questions that have not yet been asked. The historian then develops an hypothesis which offers a possible explanation, and collects evidence to support or invalidate the suggested answer. These schools rely more on humanities-oriented techniques such as biography and textual analysis. Many nineteenth century patrician historians were of this school. In this century, the progressive and consensus historians tended to be in this philosophical camp.

The confusion over the humanities/social sciences historical questions is well illustrated by that venerable reference tool, The World Book Encyclopedia. In his article on "humanism" John W. Dodds (1980) states that "humanistic

education centers around the humanities, which usually include religion, philosophy, languages, literature, history, and the arts" (Volume H, p. 385). Turning to the "S" volume, we find that Paul R. Hanna (1980) has written an article on "Social Science" in which he declares that "The social sciences focus on our life with other people in groups. They include anthropology, economics, history, political science, sociology, criminology, and the science of law" (Volume S, p. 449). So much for clear categories.

Jesse H. Shera (1969), writing in Historians, Books, and Librarians, suggests that "history...actually stands at a transitional point between the social sciences and the humanities, serving as a bridge between the two. As a distinctive intellectual interest history, whether it be considered art or science, antedates by many centuries those branches of social thought which have separated themselves from philosophy within the past two centuries" (p. 1).

Within the field of qualitative research there are numerous techniques. The literary scholar may use critical analysis; the researcher in comparative literature may use intertextuality; the anthropologist may use ethnography. Were a literary history of Yazoo City being attempted, one might well take intertextuality as a model and read a text produced by one of the locals against selected texts in the library collection to determine the extent to which the former had been influenced by the latter. However, since

little in the way of literary manuscripts was left by the nineteenth-century denizens of Yazoo, this would not be a very productive undertaking. Were one on the scene in nineteenth-century Yazoo City and able to attend an Association meeting, naturalistic research (i.e., the collection of data by observing the social interactions of the Association members) might be chosen; but this is obviously not possible.

Given the foregoing, the research method that has been chosen is historical analysis augmented by case study techniques. This is not to say that an exhaustive analysis of all possible methods has been undertaken and a conclusion drawn that historical and case study analysis alone are the only logical means of approaching the problems articulated in this project. However, there are some methods which, *ipso facto*, are not suitable; of the remaining options this was selected as the one that is most appropriate given the researcher's training and interests.

Historical analysis is such a common phrase (at least in academia) that it has come to mean many things to many people. For the purposes of this research historical analysis will be taken to mean an imaginative argument about the past which is based on facts and impressions obtained from the primary literature generated around the event being studied. The definition of primary literature is taken from Barzun and Graff (1977) who refer to it as documents created

by participants in or observers of an event. This would include diaries and journals kept by participants, newspaper accounts prepared by journalists who witnessed events, and the archives or official records of institutions and organizations connected with the event, "for example, the diaries of Count Ciano written under Mussolini's regime" (p. 94n). In the same paragraph, they go on to explain that the historian, using a number of primary sources, produces a secondary source."

Best and Kahn (1989) give a somewhat global definition to historical research which is also appropriate: "The process involves investigating, recording, analyzing, and interpreting the events of the past for the purpose of discovering generalizations that are helpful in understanding the past and the present, and, to a limited extent, in anticipating the future" (p. 24). In the jargon of sports journalism, this is called "covering all the bases."

Earlier it was mentioned that an imaginative argument would be undertaken; perhaps this deserves a little explanation. In using the phrase "an imaginative argument about the past," a fact is being acknowledged that all historians are aware of i.e., it is not desirable, profitable, or, for that matter, possible, to recreate the past. What is desirable, what is profitable, what is possible is to use historical facts to create an accessible

and easily digestible version of a past event. Initially, this is done by examining the event or institution in the web of its place and time and comparing it to other events or institutions that were similarly placed relative to their own places and times. Based on these initial observations, the historical researcher then develops an hypothesis and attempts to either prove or disprove it using historical facts. Best and Kahn (1989) in Research in Education note that historical analysis seeks to create an "integrated account" that views events, times, persons, and places in dynamic relationship to each other. While the historian will draw on much quantitative research (e.g., the census) in constructing such an account, the end product will be an imaginative (once again!) integration of these sources.

Using the term "imaginative" does not suggest that one has the right to depart from the facts and enter the world of fiction or fantasy. Rather, it refers to the creative synthesis of facts to come up with a version of history that is uniquely one's own, a version that squares with the facts while at the same time shedding new light on them. The historian never has all the facts available, but he or she uses imagination to pull the available facts together to form a defensible version of the event in question. In the Harvard Guide to American History Frank Freidel (1974) notes that "The quality of imagination, if properly restrained by the conditions of historical discipline, is of great

assistance in enabling one to discover problems to be solved, to grasp the significance of facts, to form hypotheses, to discern causes in their first beginnings and, above all, to relate the past creatively to the present" (p. 7).

Ralph Waldo Emerson suggests that imagination is important for creating history that is readable and rememberable: "A complete statement in the imaginative form of an important truth arrests attention and is repeated and remembered" (Freidel, 1974, p. 7).

Freidel makes a point which I have tried to honor in preparing this manuscript; it is unsportsmanlike to make repeated use of long quotes. To do so is to let another writer perform the work that has properly been assigned to one's self. It is also wearing on the reader to have to wade through a cut-and-paste job with a variety of styles. Freidel points out that "there is nothing so disgusting to the reader as long, tedious, broken quotations in small print, especially those in which, to make sense, the author has to interpolate words in square brackets" (p. 6). For this and other reasons the story of the Yazoo Library Association has been told largely in the writer's own words, with care being taken to cite ideas that originated elsewhere.

In writing about the Yazoo Library Association in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I have relied

heavily on primary documents, including the Association's Minutes that are preserved intact from the date of founding (1838). Other primary source documents included local newspapers, legislative records, diaries, and journals. Secondary sources (i.e., historical accounts of other library associations and of the American public library movement) were used to create a larger framework in which to place and understand the Yazoo Library Association.

Following classical historical analysis design as reported by Barzun and Graff, Sproull, and others, I reviewed the literature and identified definitions and examples of social libraries as documented by other library historians. The data related to the Yazoo Library Association were collected and organized. This body of material was then compared to the work by other historians to determine if Yazoo met the established definitions of a social library and if it resembled the examples these historians had identified in their work. I demonstrated that the Yazoo Library Association does, in fact, fit the definition and does resemble the other historical examples. This validated the hypothesis that the Yazoo Library Association was part of the social library movement of the nineteenth century, which hypothesis provides an occasion to call into question sweeping assertions by other library historians that the social library movement was a phenomenon restricted primarily to the Northeast and Midwest.



As a part of the historical analysis process, a prosopographical study of the early members of the library association was undertaken to create yet another point of comparison between Yazoo and the more publicized social libraries of the Northeast and Midwest. One of the precepts of prosopography, a method of historical analysis, is that it is impossible to truly understand individuals without reference to the classes, groups, and other identifiable social units to which they belong. Prosopography is a form of group biography which seeks to understand the impact of various groups of persons in light of their group biography, particularly the interests they have in common that have brought them together as a group and caused them to act in a particular way. One of the classic works in this area is Charles A. Beard's (1941) An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States, in which the author examined the Constitution as the product of a group of men who shared similar values and held certain economic interests in common. In his essay, "Prosopography," historian Lawrence Stone (1972) notes that the technique is also known as collective biography and that though it was "invented as a tool of political history, it is now being increasingly employed by the social historians" (p. 108). The particular use to which it was put in this research is comparative i.e., collective biographical information on social libraries identified as such in the canons of

American library history was compared to collective biographical information relative to the Yazoo Library Association. A favorable comparison between the data was interpreted as supporting documentation in the argument that the Yazoo Library Association was a social library in the same sense as were those libraries so identified by historians of American library history e.g., Shera and Ditzion.

The same sources were used in the latter part of the research which deals with the twentieth century; however, they were augmented with biographies of the present library director and the immediate past library director. Since the leadership of the Association's chief executive officer is important in understanding the direction an institution goes and the impact it has, professional biographies of the library directors were in order. The vehicle of biography was chosen -- as opposed to community survey or other social science methodology -- as a tool for determining institutional impact because it is more in alignment with the aforementioned prosopographical method and could be used to create linkages between the first half and second half of the study. The theoretical framework chosen for these biographies is the one identified by Norman Denzin (1989) in Interpretive Biography. He contends that the story of a life is determined by the perceived audience (in this case, library historians) and that the structure of the story is

formed by markers, which is to say, by pivotal events. Therefore, the biographies herein contained are professional biographies of librarians built around the pivotal professional points of the biographees' careers. Biography also lends itself well to case study analysis because, as Charles H. Busha and Stephen P. Harter (1980) point out in Research Methods in Librarianship, case studies focus on a single research object with the idea of gathering "extensive data about it so that relationships among variables associated with the observed phenomenon can be identified" (p. 151). Busha and Harter go on to point out that a "primary advantage of case studies is the opportunity they afford for thorough and detailed examination and analysis of a research problem so that findings can be applied directly to the object of an inquiry" (p. 152).

Beyond this consideration, biography is a highly relevant tool for unearthing the individual motivations and aspirations that affect institutional life. In Christy Catherine Marshall demonstrates very powerfully how one's commitment and sense of personal mission can affect institutions with which one is affiliated. In order to understand these institutions, one needs to understand the personalities that have influenced them. Just as a cataloging of the sociological changes that occurred in Cutter Gap in no way accounts for what really happened when Christy went there as a teacher, so the dramatic successes

of an institution like the Yazoo Library Association in the face of such traumas as integration and economic collapse cannot be adequately understood without taking account of the persons who led the institutions during these times. In his essay, "Research Methodologies and Curriculum Definitions," Dale Brubaker (1991) points out that stories help us see the dilemmas and contradictions of the real world. When the research question involves human motivation, the methodologies of the qualitative approaches provide a better illumination for our path than the highly refracted light given off by quantitative research. The former, because it is willing to risk being immersed in the a hermeneutic sea, has a greater potential for yielding understanding than the latter which strives to keep its skirts clear of the often murky waters in which human motivations are found.

Historian John Tosh (1984) explains it like this:

Human events must be carefully distinguished from natural events because the identity between the enquirer and his or her subject-matter opens the way to a fuller understanding than anything which the natural scientist can aspire to. Whereas natural events can only be understood from the outside, human events have an essential "inside" dimension composed of the intentions, feelings and mentality of the actors (1984, p. 110).

The historical research skills the writer brings to this project have been honed through graduate courses in historical methodology, thorough the application of those

skills in subsequent writing, and in work as a reference librarian. The skills of biographical writing were developed during graduate coursework in curriculum and educational administration. This coursework revealed the value of using humanities-based research to shed new light on and enrich the life of a discipline that is primarily oriented to the quantitative research methods of the social sciences. These courses offered the opportunity not only to study the theory of biographical writing through texts such as the Denzin monograph but also to read good biographical writings such as the aforementioned Christy and, then, to practice the art of both biography and autobiography.

The decision to use qualitative research in approaching the dissertation problem grows out of an interest in knowing more than when, where, and by how many people the Yazoo Library Association was founded. As a student of intellectual and cultural history, the writer is more interested in the "why" and "how" questions. Other driving forces behind the qualitative choice are a desire to analyze to what extent cultural and intellectual forces in the larger world influenced the doings of people in this small Delta town, and to understand to what extent the intellectual vitality of this band of library founders may have influenced the larger world beyond the banks of the Yazoo River. Finally, by capturing the story of this unusual association and the people who led it, it is hoped

that a place can be claimed for this small institution in the rich tapestry of American library history, a place which it deserves but has never had.

CHAPTER IV  
THE YAZOO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Founding: 1838-1847

Situated on a triangular-shaped piece of parkland just north of Yazoo City's commercial district, the Ricks Memorial Library occupies a place of distinction in the city's geography. The commercial center of the city is roughly in the shape of a teardrop. The pointed top of the teardrop is formed by the confluence of Main and Washington Streets, and it is in this tip of the teardrop that the park is located. The southern boundary of the park is formed by Powell Street, a short strait that connects the two larger traffic arteries. The library shares the park with the Triangular Cultural Center, a former school building that has been converted into a multipurpose center for the arts. It houses a theatre, a museum, the city's archives, a dance studio, and sundry other cultural enterprises. The library's nearest neighbors beyond the boundaries of the park are the flagship churches of the area's major denominations e.g., Trinity Episcopal, First Presbyterian, First United Methodist, and St. Mary's Roman Catholic. The care with which the library is maintained bespeaks the importance the city attaches to this facility. What is

of this Delta city.

This chapter concerns itself with the history of the association which created and continues to sponsor this library. In it the researcher first looks at the origins of the association and examines the nineteenth century roots of an institution that finds itself in full flower today. The researcher next examines the library's place within the larger context of one of nineteenth century America's more interesting intellectual phenomena -- the social library movement. Finally, the researcher reviews the library's gradual evolution to a public library and the role that the administrative skills of its leadership played in maneuvering the institution through the turbulent waters associated with such events as desegregation.

\* \* \*

The Yazoo Library Association dates its beginning from shortly after peace was made with the Indians in northern Mississippi. Its story begins with the Doak's Stand Cession of the 1820's in which the Choctaw Indians gave over huge tracts of land for settlement to the United States. (Skates, 1979, pp. 80-82)

It was in this newly-opened territory at a place originally known as Hanan's Bluff and later incorporated as the town of Manchester in 1830 (Rowland, 1907, pp. 998-999) (the name was changed to Yazoo City in 1839 [DeCell & Pritchard, 1976, p. 76]), that the story of the Yazoo



Library Association begins. (The Yazoo Library Association refers to the corporate organization; the Ricks Memorial Library refers to the building which has housed the library since the early 1900's.) Located on a hairpin turn in the Yazoo River just as it begins rising into the Bluff Hills, the city is at the highest navigable point on the river. "The doubling back and the immediate rising nature of the land adjacent," explains local historian Harriet DeCell, "created the first practical landing from the source of the river up in the Mississippi Delta" (DeCell & Pritchard, 1976, p. 70).

Yazoo City of the 1830's was not just another country crossroads around which a few families had coalesced. The city was a vital communications link between the state's recently-opened interior and the commercial centers of Vicksburg, Natchez, and, more importantly, New Orleans. The city served as an inland port from which the area's agriculture was shipped and from which the city's merchant and professional classes and the area's planters took passage to points in the larger world and through which they received provisions and news (Yazoo City Whig, 12 July 1839).

In her fine history of the county, DeCell (1976) suggests that the county was, in fact, a microcosm of the state, with the western portion being given over to large, Natchez-style farms, while the eastern portion was populated

with smaller agricultural units. Of Satarita, a community in the county's southwest section, she reports, "the farms generally were larger than in the eastern part of the county, the slaves more numerous, and the homes more spacious" (p. 63).

Within this setting there developed a thriving small city. And if the newspapers of the day are any index, the population presented a picture of healthy heterogeneity. The two main political parties of the day -- Whigs and Democrats -- were both represented by lively publications.

It is highly doubtful that the 14 men who assembled on 8 August 1838 to enquire into the possibilities of establishing a library association had any idea that they were setting in motion an institution that would survive a war, the collapse and rebuilding of their society, sundry financial depressions and world calamities, and -- perhaps the most amazing of all -- the advent of television. But survive it has, and today the Yazoo Library Association continues as a testimony to the vision and commitment of those Delta pioneers who assembled at "early candlelight" (DeCell & Pritchard 1976, p. 148) to share books, engage in debate, and provide yet additional evidence that learning is, indeed, a lifelong experience.

One impetus for the Association's formation at this time may have come from Yazoo City's sister cities in the region and their natural influence on the developing Delta

country. Yazoo's connection via steamboats and horseback to more settled communities such as Vicksburg, Natchez, and New Orleans is well documented.

Mary Bonney Field (1926), writing in one of the local newspapers earlier this century, relates her mother's recollections of how, in the early 1830's, she had to go far afield of Yazoo City for education. "There were no schools in the neighborhood, no libraries, nor educational advantages. Children were sent by those who could afford it to distant towns, traveling on horseback. My mother and her brother...went to Canton to a denominational school...[and] afterward to Natchez" (Yazoo City Herald, 29 January 1926).

The newspapers of the day are full of advertisements and editorial copy attesting to the vital communications link provided by steamships. One advertisement in the 16 December 1831 issue of the Vicksburg Advocate announces that the Creole will "ply as a regular trader between New Orleans and Manchester (Yazoo City) on the Yazoo River, touching at Natchez, Rodney, Grand Gulf, New Carthage, Warrenton, and Vicksburg." By 1844 there were four steamboats -- the Belle of Attakapas, Volant, Effont, and General Morgan -- advertising regular service between Yazoo City and either Vicksburg or New Orleans (Yazoo City Whig and Political Register, 26 January 1844).

There was, in short, no dearth of avenues for intellectual cross fertilization between Yazoo City and her

older, more established down-river neighbors. And, according to Mississippi historian Laura S. D. Harrell, the intellectual seeds which were eventually to sprout in Yazoo City in the form of a library/lyceum may well have come from one of these neighbors. In her article, "The Lyceum Movement Prior to 1860," Harrell (1969) reports that there was a flourishing lyceum meeting at the Masonic Hall in Natchez in 1832 and that other cities on Yazoo City's immediate trading routes -- e.g., Washington, Port Gibson, Vicksburg -- were likewise participating in this increasingly popular institution (p. 194).

However, the propagation of the lyceum gospel was not left entirely to chance contacts. In 1837 the Natchez lyceum began publishing the South-Western Journal, a fortnightly publication "devoted to the sciences and literary interests of the Southern section of the Great vale of the Mississippi" (Harrell, 1969, p. 195). Harrell (1969) theorizes that the Journal's circulation throughout Mississippi and the accompanying coverage given the lyceum activities by the widely circulated Natchez newspapers "doubtless spurred the movement in other Mississippi towns" (p. 196). Another impetus was the social library movement itself, which, according to its progenitor, Benjamin Franklin, had spread by a variety of means, including word of mouth and publicity.

The Yazoo Library Association was founded on 8 September 1838 under the name of the Manchester Library Association. When the city voted to change its name to Yazoo City the next year, the Association followed suit and became the Yazoo Library Association, by which name it is still known today (1992). The job of designing a constitution and by-laws for the new association was delegated to a committee composed of insurance agent Malaci B. Hamer and attorneys W. E. Pugh, John Murdaugh, and F. W. Quackenboss. The by-laws provided for an initiation fee of fifty cents and monthly dues of twenty-five cents, "payable in advance" (By-laws, Yazoo Library Association). The Minutes of 8 September 1838 also record a general appeal for new members.

By the group's third meeting on 24 September 1838, several new members had been recruited, and the group began to turn its attention to the most visible attribute of a library -- the book collection. Toward this end the Association appointed a committee "to make selections of books of a proper character for the formation of a library for the Association..." (Minutes, Yazoo Library Association, September 24, 1838). Like libraries before and since, the Yazoo Library Association was not opposed to accepting charity; the Minutes for November of 1843 reflect that the Association voted to accept a gift of books from C. F. Hamer. Showing yet another hallmark of established

libraries, the Association voted on this same occasion to instruct the secretary to "make a catalogue of the books" (Minutes, Yazoo Library Association, 24 September 1838). That the collection was maintained and growing is evidenced by the fact that in 1843 a committee was authorized to purchase additional bookcases (Minutes, Yazoo Library Association, 27 November 1843).

While details of their first meetings and debates are recorded -- sometimes with more care than others -- the Association's early efforts at book collecting have not survived. The minutes book makes reference to the librarian having been instructed to "make a catalogue," of the books; however, the catalogue itself has not survived. Nonetheless, this does indicate that the Association was following the example laid down by other social libraries such as the Philadelphia Library Company, for which there are extant published catalogues, and the Coonskin Library in Ohio, which incorporated acquisitions into its Minutes book; it even used this accessioning list as a type of circulation system, according to Vinnie J. Mayer (1961). Each book, as it was accessioned, was entered into the Minutes book with a corresponding number. The number was then written in the front of the book. When someone checked a book out the accession number was recorded by the librarian. "When the book was returned, a diagonal line through the book number canceled the patron's responsibility for the volume" (p.

49).

Though the Association was growing as evidenced by the increasing book collection and membership rolls, it was not immune to problems. In the Association's initial year of operation the first membership casualty occurred when Murdaugh resigned. Though the Minutes give no reason for Murdaugh's decision, the Yazoo City Whig and Political Register the following year reported that he had dissolved his law partnership with Quackenboss (the Association's vice president) and moved to Texas (20 September 1839). No documents or publications yet uncovered give any indication of what precipitated these events; consequently, one can only surmise the reasons behind them. A possible explanation is that he and his partner had personal differences. However, a more likely explanation is that Murdaugh fell victim to the highly unstable economy of the day and found himself financially embarrassed. Many similarly affected individuals chose exactly this means of escape -- they went to Texas to avoid their creditors and begin life with clean slates. It's a theory with which American historian Fredrick Jackson Turner would have a lot of sympathy. Part of Turner's thesis is that the frontier offered a place where persons could escape to and start a new life. At all events, Murdaugh's departure begins a pattern of joining and dropping out on the part of members. This pattern may be attributable to the fact that some

members fell on economic hard times and were unable to pay the Association's membership fees. The Association was inflexible in its requirement that membership fees be paid and even went to the extreme of suing some members who were in arrears. Those members who were so far behind in their dues that they could not catch up appear to have taken the line of least resistance -- they dropped out of the Association.

In addition to the previously mentioned Hamer, Pugh, Murdaugh, and Quackenboss, the Yazoo Library Association had the following charter members: S. R. Adams, E. M. Adcock, Richard Allen, Fountain Barksdale, W. F. Courtenay, R. S. Dulin, J. W. Exum, J. S. Fuqua, George Garr, E. B. Grayson, Charles Griswold, Alfred Hall, M. B . Hamer, J. J. Jackson, R. E. Keyes, J. W. McKinstry, James Warren, and R. M. Winn. Of this group, Hamer was elected president; Quackenboss, vice president; Garr, secretary; Barksdale, treasurer; and Keyes, librarian (Halsell, 1975, pp. 32-33).

An indication of the group's influence was that in 1839, the Mississippi Legislature designated the Yazoo Library Association as recipient of "all fines, penalties, forfeitures, and amercements, which may have been assessed" by Yazoo County (Laws of the State of Mississippi...1839, p. 279). A year later the Mississippi Legislature once again acted on behalf of the Yazoo Library Association, this time passing an act establishing the Association as a corporate



entity. The act spoke specifically to the purposes of the Association's creation "which are hereby declared to be solely and exclusively for the accumulation and preservation of a public library, and the promotion of literature, and the diffusion of useful knowledge." (Laws of the State of Mississippi...1840, pp. 38, 40) Though the act speaks of the Yazoo Library Association as a "public library," it was not, in fact, a public library in the sense that we speak of today i.e., a library funded at government expense which is open to and makes materials and programming available for all ages free of charge within the area served by the funding government. However, the fact is that social libraries of the nineteenth century were often referred to as "public libraries." Davis and Tucker (1989) note that though the term "social library" has come to denote an associational library of the late eighteenth through the early twentieth century which one joined either through the payment of fees or purchase of stock, they were not always known by that name at the time. "In the nineteenth century, many of these libraries were known as 'public libraries,' a term that gradually came to describe tax-supported, publicly administered libraries open to all freely on an equal basis" (1989, p. 56).

There is good evidence that the Yazoo Library Association sought to influence the above-mentioned legislative acts. The Minutes report that at its meeting on

24 October 1838, the Association elected State Representative C. E. Wilkenson as an honorary member. This honorary membership -- as well as later honors the group voted to bestow -- did two things. It elevated the status of the Association by asserting that it was a recognized and established enough organization to hand out honors, and it built a bridge between the Association and the state law-making body in Jackson. When the legislature considered removing the assessment benefit in 1842, the Association appointed a committee of twenty-five members to "memorialize the legislature and to remonstrate against the passage of a bill now pending before that body which has as its object the taking away [of] the funds to be derived by the Association" (Minutes, Yazoo Library Association, 14 February 1842) under the terms of the previously mentioned act .

An analysis of the charter members of the Association indicates that it well may have had significant influence in Jackson. The Association was composed of a group of young (usually 20-30 years of age) business and professional men who were established community leaders and often active in politics. Many of them wore different hats (e.g., merchants had interest in banks; bankers were involved in politics, etc.), but with several notable exceptions they constituted the leadership core of the city's younger generation. They included among their ranks the man who was to become the

city's highest wage earner, Fountain Barksdale (DeCell and Pritchard 1976, P. 422); the postmaster, R. E. Keyes; almost every prominent lawyer in the city (Yazoo City State Rights and Democratic Union 13 August 1839); the only advertised insurance agent, Malaci B. Hamer (Yazoo City State Rights and Democratic Union 30 October 1839); the editors of both newspapers; several bankers; numerous grocers; and sundry political candidates.

Some members eventually proved to be more successful than others. For instance, the 1870 census (the first census to record income) lists Fountain Barksdale as being the highest wage earner in the county. His salary was \$20,000 per year. Other members of the Association had varying degrees of success; however, there appears to have been only one truly disreputable member among the lot. He was Charles Griswold, a teller at the Commercial Bank of Manchester who embezzled and absconded with \$11,007.56 of the bank's money (DeCell & Pritchard, 1976, p. 179).

The eighth of October 1838, marked an important date in the library's history. On this occasion the Association held its first debate, the question before the house being "Was the United States Bank both constitutional and expedient?" On a nine-to-two vote the question went to the "ayes." The question chosen for the next week's debate was considerably more philosophical: "Which will sustain man best -- genius or application?" (Minutes, Yazoo Library

Association, 8 October 1838)

During the library's early period (1838-1847) the questions for debate reflect an interest in philosophy and the great issues of European history. While the topics also reflect an interest in matters of national and regional importance, they carefully eschew partisan politics. Though it is nowhere stated, one gets the impression that partisan political issues were specifically avoided as they went counter to the more intellectual nature of lyceums and, also, because with both Whigs and Democrats heavily represented in the Association, such questions would have likely lowered the tone of the meetings to one of personal combativeness. Consequently, the Association members selected debate topics that, while interesting, were far enough removed from immediate political concerns to be safely debated. Concerning the history and culture of the British Isles, the "disputants," according to the Minutes, were interested to determine if the beheading of Charles I were a "patriotic or traitorous measure," (15 October 1838) whether Ireland or Scotland can claim the most eminent poets, (24 October 1842) if Elizabeth I was "justified in signing the death warrant of Mary Queen of Scots," (14 November 1842) and if Henry VIII's divorce of Catherine of Aragon was "justifiable in sight of God or man" (11 April 1842 and 10 October 1842). An interest in general philosophical concerns led the debaters to inquire if

"parsimony conduce[s] more to the increase of wealth than industry" (27 December 1839)? Subjects of general interest to the community such as the value of temperance societies and the importance of a property qualification for the voting franchise were also addressed (27 November 1843). Somewhat farther afield, the members inquired into the merits of an international court, (11 April 1843) asked "whether has the Romance of Don Quixote or Locke's Essay on Understanding done more for the improvement of mankind?" (21 January 1839) and discussed the question of whether "the religion of Mahomet or Martin Luther" has had the most impact on the human race (13 March 1843).

The strong British flavor of some of these debate topics reflects the area's contacts with the British Isles, a fact born out by the town's original name of Manchester and other area town names such as Liverpool. In his article, "A Memoir of Reconstruction in Yazoo City," historian E. H. Anderson suggests that the town of Manchester was originally named after England's Manchester, the leading cotton mart of the Old World." (1942, P. 187) The fact that England was the chief consumer of Yazoo County's main cash crop -- cotton -- further establishes the community's interests in England that were played out in the debating halls of the Yazoo Library Association.

The extent and variety of debates underscores the fact that initially the Yazoo Library Association was as much a

lyceum as a library. As noted earlier, lyceums were important adjuncts to social libraries. Begun by Josiah Holbrook of Milbury, Massachusetts in 1826, the lyceum movement (technically, the "Society for Mutual Education") was designed to "use any device for advancing knowledge that might properly be employed by the participants" (Shera, 1949, p. 227). In his book, The American Lyceum, Holbrook (1829) concluded that the lyceums and their accompanying intellectual stimulation created new demands for books and other reading materials and that this, consequently, "called neglected libraries into use" (p. 5) and spurred the creation of new ones. Shera (1949) takes a more reserved view of the lyceum's role, but notes that "the movement has significance as an indication of the culture that encouraged the public library." He further observes that "both the library and the lyceum were parts of the general faith in man's ability for self-improvement" (p. 220). The lyceum movement, as indicated by the variety and number of debates, was certainly a vital part of Yazoo City's intellectual life as well as a spur to the rapidly developing library in the city.

Concurrent with the increase in lyceum activities was an increasing interest in involving the public in the affairs of the library, and in August 1842 it was resolved by the Association that the public be "invited to attend further meetings of the Association" (Minutes, Yazoo Library

Association, 22 August 1842). There were periodic public debates such as the one held on 2 May 1843 concerning whether the execution of Charles I of England was a legal act and to which admission was charged (Minutes, Yazoo Library Association, 11 April 1843). These programs -- held either at the courthouse or the Presbyterian Church -- seem to have had two basic purposes: raising funds and raising public consciousness about the library. In March 1844 in a further effort to involve the public in the library's activities it was resolved that "with a view of extending the usefulness of the Association and bringing it more prominently before the public" that the Association would invite "distinguished gentlemen" to lecture before the Association six times a year (Minutes, Yazoo Library Association, 25 March 1844).

As these intellectual and public service activities were continuing there was an increasing emphasis on the financial obligations of membership. This emphasis began as early as the Association's third meeting when the treasurer was authorized to "begin collecting such dues as are provided for in the by-laws..." (Minutes, Yazoo Library Association, 24 September 1838). By January 1843 a special collector, R. M. Winn, had been appointed to collect past due monies, and another officer of the Association, N. P. Cook, had been authorized to proceed with law suits against those who did not cooperate with Mr. Winn's efforts

(Minutes, Yazoo Library Association, 9 January 1843). At one time there were as many as 33 members whose names were on the overdue blacklist. Blacklisting appears to have consisted mainly of having one's name entered into the Minutes book, having one's offense announced in an Association meeting, and being dunned by the collector. There is no indication that members whose accounts were in arrears were refused admission to meetings, but there is every indication that they would be embarrassingly aware of the status of their accounts if they did come (Minutes, Yazoo Library Association, 28 July 1843). Some members took umbrage at the treatment they were receiving. On one occasion three members resigned in apparent protest over the blacklisting policy. In an effort at conciliation, the members' fines were reduced and calm apparently returned to the organization (Minutes, Yazoo Library Association, 11 April 1843). The emergence of a leadership style that values negotiation and rapprochement began early in this Association. This style was to stand the Association in good stead when the civil rights movement of the 1960's begins shaking institutional foundations across the South.

As early as 1844 there were indications that the Association was having difficulty maintaining itself as an institution. There were periods during this year when as many as five consecutive bi-weekly meetings had to be canceled owing to a lack of attendance (Minutes, Yazoo



Library Association, 24 December 1843 - 27 February 1844). By 1845 the meeting rate was less than once per month. The last recorded meeting during this initial period was 10 April 1847. Held at the Presbyterian Church, the subject of this gathering was the purchase of a suitable lot on which to construct a building for the Association's use (Minutes, Yazoo Library Association, 10 April 1843). Even though there were no more meetings recorded in the Minutes book prior to the Association being reactivated in 1871, there is evidence of associational activity during the hiatus. The building lot mentioned in the meeting of April 1847 was not only purchased, but also a building was erected. According to DeCell and Pritchard (1976), the Association purchased a lot adjacent to the present location of St. Mary's Catholic Church for \$300. A building was erected by the Association and the Manchester Fusiliers, a local ceremonial military guard, and "the two groups moved into their jointly owned building" (p. 149). The Yazoo Democrat reported on 12 September 1850 that the Association had tried unsuccessfully to open a public reading room where area newspapers would be made available free of charge.

The reasons for the library's decline and temporary closure are not entirely clear. The Minutes do not speak to the closure other than to acknowledge the lapse after activities were resumed (Minutes, Yazoo Library Association, 22 June 1871). However, there are enough indications in the

available source material to allow for the construction of a defensible theory. As has already been noted, the Yazoo Library Association was formed during the early period of the city's existence, less than twenty years after the Doak's Stand treaty and subsequent Indian treaties opened up the northern portion of Mississippi to settlement and development (Skates 1979, 80-81). Initially the city was relatively isolated, and there was a corresponding low level of economic activity, allowing the young city's merchant and professional classes the luxury of affiliating for the purpose of book exchanges and debates. However, as more and more of the surrounding wilderness was cleared, more and more slaves brought in, and more and more of the area's rich, black soil put into cotton production, things started to boom. As the highest navigable point on the Yazoo River, the city became a main collection point for the crops throughout the area, and, in consequence, a distribution point for products and goods imported for exchange. The census figures support this economic boom theory. The 1830 census shows the county's white population as 4,078 and its non-white population as 2,472. The 1850 census shows the white population remaining almost constant at 4,069, but the black population was 10,349, a more than 400 percent increase (DeCell & Pritchard, 1976, p. 416).

As this boom progressed, there was a corresponding increase in business for the merchant and professional

classes (the majority of the Association's membership), and one can imagine that their leisure time became quite scarce as the increasing cotton traffic through this inland port offered them the opportunity of amassing considerable wealth. That the library members took advantage of the opportunities offered by this exploding market is evident in the number of the charter members who rose to prominence and wealth in the city. A number of cases illustrate this.

Fountain Barksdale was brother to two of nineteenth century Mississippi's most well known journalists: Ethelbert, editor of the Mississippian in Jackson, and William, editor of the Columbus Democrat (McKee, 1966, pp. 8-14). Fountain was also to distinguish himself by becoming chairman of the board of the Commercial Bank of Manchester, (DeCell & Pritchard, 1976, p. 422) and, as has already been mentioned, as the highest paid person in the county in 1870, the first year that salaries were recorded in the census.

R. S. Dulin became chairman of the bar association of the county and eventually ran as a candidate for state representative on the Democratic ticket (Yazoo City State Rights and Democratic Union, 30 October 1839). Other members whose success can be surmised based on their positions of prominence include Sheriff J. W. Fuqua (DeCell & Pritchard, 1976, pp. 252-253); M. B. Hamer, insurance agent and commission merchant (Yazoo City State Rights and Democratic Union, 30 October 1839); R. E. Keyes, whose terms

as postmaster, justice of the peace, and mayor overlapped each other (Yazoo City State Rights and Democratic Union, 10 March 1843); J. W. McKinstry, editor of the Yazoo City State Rights and Democratic Union (DeCell & Pritchard, 1976, p. 76); and F. W. Quackenboss, director of the Manchester branch of the Bank of Mississippi (DeCell & Pritchard, 1976, p. 252) and selectman of the city of Yazoo City (Yazoo City Whig and Political Register, 13 September 1839).

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In his study of the predecessors of public libraries, Jesse Shera (1949) identified two types of social libraries, proprietary and subscription. The former was a joint stock company in which members purchased shares that, in turn, gave them interest in the real value of the library. The shares could be sold or transferred (e.g., through inheritance). Normally, there was an annual fee assessed stockholders for the maintenance of the library. Subscription libraries, on the other hand, were joint stock companies generally requiring initiation fees as well as annual maintenance fees. Shera states that proprietary libraries normally cost more to buy into than subscription libraries did and, consequently, appealed to a more wealthy clientele. The athenaeum usually belonged to the proprietary category. The athenaeum was an aristocratic version of the social library patronized by the wealthy; normally an athenaeum was well enough funded to maintain a

commodious reading room complete with newspapers and literary periodicals. Social libraries also were developed in relationship to other institutions such as temperance unions, historical societies, and Young Men's Christian Associations. The social libraries were often developed by or for specific groups, e.g., mercantile workers, mechanics, and mechanics' apprentices. The Yazoo City library belonged to a category Shera refers to as "general" social libraries i.e., libraries that the general public could buy into or join. This form of the social library is referred to in the literature of the day as "public libraries."

An examination of several of the libraries documented in the history of social library development present a picture or profile that is remarkably similar to that presented by the Yazoo Library Association. As in Yazoo City, the general or public social libraries tended to be founded by and patronized by the professional classes. In his study of reading habits in nineteenth-century Baltimore, Larry E. Sullivan (1980) found that in 1844 the Library Company of Baltimore was composed of the following categories, listed in descending order: merchants, attorneys, doctors, officeholders, bankers, clergy, manufacturers and railroad men, architects and engineers, craftsmen, insurance company presidents, and farmers. In her analysis of the Philadelphia Library Company, Margaret Korty (1971) found that the original directors of the

company represented the professions/occupations of medicine, law, silversmithing, blacksmithing, and farming. With a few exceptions, most of the same categories were represented in the Yazoo Library Association. Merchants (e.g., Fountain Barksdale), lawyers (e.g., F. W. Quackenboss), and officeholders (e.g., postmaster R. E. Keyes) were well represented, though there were no architects or railroadmen among the founders of the Yazoo City library. A collection of biographies of founders of the Boston Athenaeum included in Josiah Quincy's (1851) history of that institution reveals its ranks to have been largely populated by merchants and lawyers as well.

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In addition to the business boom in the cotton trade and its residual impact on the city's economy, there was also an increase in contact with the wider world as steam ship service grew in response to developing commerce. This made reading materials, including books and newspapers, more accessible to the educated classes, with a corresponding decrease in the need for an institution that was set up to share limited bibliographic resources. Periodic bouts of yellow fever also served to sap the available leisure time and life's blood of the members. Yellow fever was "the real scourge of the area," according to DeCell and Pritchard (1976, p. 167). At this time, on the national level, there was the beginning of a trend to establish publicly-supported

libraries. The Peterborough (NH) Town Library was established in 1834 with funds provided by the state, making it the world's first public library. Pointing to Peterborough's historical significance, Shera (1949) notes that

there for the first time an institution was founded by a town with the deliberate purpose of creating a free library that would be open to all classes of the community -- a library supported from the beginning by public funds (p. 169).

Somewhat later, in 1854, the move toward publicly funded libraries received a real shot in the arm when the first major public library was founded, the Boston Public Library. This movement may well account for the Association's increasing efforts to involve the public in what began essentially as a fairly closed group of the city's elite. The identity crisis over whether it was to be a public library for all or a social library for a few may have precipitated the Association's decline. There is no doubt that the impending Civil War had a detrimental effect on the library, and the fact that the Association did not regroup until many years after the war's end illustrates the devastating impact such conflicts have on social institutions.

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#### The Interim: 1847-1871

Between 1847 and 1871 there appears to have been almost

no activity, though after the war there was at least one newspaper notice appealing to the Association's members to reassemble. The most information about the library during this period comes from a report recorded in the Association's Minutes for 1 August 1892. The report, compiled by two members, R.L. Smith and James B. Thompson, confirms that the Association was "in abeyance so to speak from April 10th 1847 to June 12th 1871." Even though it was in abeyance during this period, the Association finalized the purchase of the property at lot No. 76 shortly after the 1847 date (DeCell & Pritchard, 1976, p. 92).

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#### Reorganization: 1871-1900

During the 1871-1900 period the country was undergoing a series of dislocating and disrupting events. The South was still rebuilding after the Civil War, there were recurring bouts with Yellow Fever (particularly along southern rivers), and sundry financial/economic disasters sent the nation reeling on a regular basis. The worst of the financial/economic disasters was the Panic of 1873 which left more than three million people unemployed. Writing in Chronology of the United States, John Clements (1975) notes that the panic was "accompanied by widespread business failures and accompanying economic distress" (p. 100). Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (1983) notes that the panic, that was precipitated by the failure of the "respectable



brokerage firm of Jay Cooke and Company" (pp. 324-325) caused 5,000 businesses to fail in 1873 and another 10,000-plus to fail during the ensuing five years (1983, PP. 324-325). Somewhat later in this period, the nation was thrown into an economic and social turmoil by what historian Richard Hofstadter has called the "Status Revolution." Prior to the industrial revolution of the late nineteenth century, according to Hofstadter's theory, the clergy, the medical practitioners, and other professionals had held the esteemed positions in society. However, with the advent of big industry and big business there developed a new class of super-rich industrialists at the top of the social pyramid. This group included such names as Rockefeller, Gould, and Carnegie. The rapid rise of big business in an economy tied tightly to the gold standard meant that most of the nation's available capital had been sucked up into the whirlwind of expanding industry, and money was becoming tighter and tighter. The previous kings of the social pyramid were threatened by this new elite and, for their own protection, began forming themselves into associations to protect their status and promote their interests.

During this period of the late nineteenth century, many of today's professional associations were founded, including the National Education Association in 1870, American Library Association in 1876, and the American Bar Association in 1878. Meanwhile, the lower classes were under increasing

financial pressures resulting from the rapid industrial expansion when the nation was tied to a slow-moving gold-standard economy. The social foment caused by these pressures resulted in two powerful social/political movements in America: Populism, which, among other things, attempted to relieve the pressure by going to a silver standard, and Progressivism, which attempted to rectify the social problems caused by big business and big industry through government regulation of business and industry and through attempts to make business and industry take responsibility for the negative social fallout occasioned by the industrial revolution.

Against this background of national instability and turmoil, the Yazoo Library Association attempted to reestablish itself. The national turmoil was reflected in the Association during this period as the Association waxed and waned in response to the larger economic and political environment. To be sure, the Association had some close calls during this period, but in spite of the odds it revived. By the end of the century it was not only reestablished, it was entering one of its periods of greatest prosperity. There were at least two clear watersheds during this period. The first was obviously the revival of the organization in 1871. The second was another reorganization which included the selling of the library's building and the investment of the funds in, among other

things, books. This was accompanied by an intense public relations campaign designed to revitalize the Association and increase its membership.

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After a hiatus of more than 20 years during which a civil war was fought and the legal and cultural foundations of the South permanently changed, the Yazoo Library Association was reactivated on 12 June 1871. Unfortunately for the historian, the recording secretary for that evening's reorganization meeting was laconic in the extreme, so that little of what happened was recorded; he did not even acknowledge the 20-plus lapse in years since the last meeting. Why the Association was reestablished at this time is not indicated, though part of the reason must be attributed to the waning of Reconstruction and the easing of restrictions on Southern society. Although Reconstruction did not technically end until 1877 with the election of Rutherford B. Hayes, William A. Dunning (1969), in his essay, "The Undoing of Reconstruction," notes that "In July of 1870, when the law declaring Georgia entitled to representation in Congress was finally enacted, the process of reconstruction was, from the technical point of view, complete" (p. 134).

Fortunately, future recording secretaries were more attentive to detail and the story of the library begins to emerge after a thorough reading of the Minutes of subsequent

sessions. Apparently one of the driving forces in getting the library started again was the Rev. J. W. Kerr, a local clergyman. He chaired the committee that drafted new by-laws for the reorganized Association, according to the Minutes of 22 June 1871. Another clergyman, the Rev. C. E. Cunningham, confirms Kerr's pivotal role in the reorganization. "The reorganization of 1871 was largely due to Reverend J. W. Kerr, an unselfish and finely equipped man for his kind of work..." (Yazoo Library Association, n.d., p. 5). The Minutes of 3 July 1878 record a resolution, passed on the occasion of Kerr's being transferred to a pastorate away from Yazoo City, acknowledging that the Association's revival and current condition of prosperity are "in great measure due to Dr. Kerr." Cunningham himself was later acknowledged by librarian Annie (Mrs. Fountain) Barksdale as having been instrumental in the 1871 reorganization. Barksdale noted in the Minutes of 20 December 1910 that Cunningham's

connection with the library began with its reorganization nearly twenty years ago. From that time until his death last Spring he was an able and useful member of the Library Association, serving as president and afterwards as chairman of the Board of Control.

However, Kerr did not act alone in reviving the Yazoo Library Association. As in its earlier manifestation, the Association was peopled by many of the city's influential

citizens. Joining Kerr on the first slate of officers for the revived association were land baron and clergyman Richard Abbey; Robert Bowman, a local judge (DeCell & Pritchard, 1976, p. 316); State Representative James Burruss (DeCell & Pritchard, p. 423); State Senator W. H. Luse (DeCell & Pritchard, p. 424); Dr. J. S. Curtis, whom the Whigs had put up for State Treasurer in 1841 (Yazoo City Whig, 29 October 1841); and W. P. Epperson, who at various times in his distinguished career was a newspaper editor, a judge, and a state representative. With Fountain Barksdale, Epperson was one of the city's leading voices for moderation during the trying times of Reconstruction (DeCell & Pritchard, 1976, p. 348).

The Minutes of 29 June 1871 record that the Association had gone as far as appointing a committee "to report the judgement of the female members as to their present status..." The committee was formed of six members of the library's auxiliary, namely "Mrs. Kidd, Miss Reach, Mrs. Bowman, Mrs. Emery, Miss Shepherd, and Mrs. Burrus."

The recurring theme of involving the public in its work surfaced again at this meeting when R. Abbey was requested to prepare a lecture on "The Types of Mankind" and "that the public be requested to attend."

On 27 July 1871 the Minutes record that the Association took under advisement the question, "Should the national capital be removed to St. Louis." The debate serves to

illustrate the association's increased involvement in national and topical affairs as there was, in fact, a fervent discussion at this time -- particularly in St. Louis -- as to whether the federal capital should be moved to this "city of unlimited greatness." In his history of Missouri, Paul C. Nagel (1977) notes that the publication of St. Louis, the Future Great City of the World by Logan U. Reavis in 1870 had fired St. Louisans' desire for the prestige the national capital would bring. Then, in 1871, St. Louis' major rival as a mid-continent capital, Chicago, was destroyed by fire, an event which St. Louisans took as a positive omen for their city's national pretensions. In their own disputation, the Yazooans decided that the capital should not be moved. The debate and its outcome do not establish a case for the Yazoo Library Association being a great prognosticator of unfolding historical events; they do illustrate, however, that Yazooans, through the agency of their library, were being made aware of and -- in their own modest way -- participating in the great national events swirling around them. Yazoo City might be geographically in the backwaters, but intellectually it was in the main stream. This articulates well with the assertion by DeCell, former director of the Yazoo Library Association, during a 1991 interview about the intellectual and scholarly qualities of the community.

I think it is very interesting that the town was begun in the early 1830's. They built churches and they formed this library association all at the same time. It's that early. There's always been a little scholarly part of Yazoo City. There's always been a little intellectualishness that flowed from the town that may not be in all towns.

That the Association was still perceived as a primarily male organization is revealed in the report of the committee to study the status of women, which reported that the women "prefer being honorary members of the association." However, the same report revealed that changes might be in the offing when the women declared that "they desire no immunity from the library obligations of the association or any exclusion from its privileges" (Minutes, 27 July 1871). In fact, the women, according to the Minutes, were active participants in the library's lyceum activities, with various members regularly giving readings and recitations. The library's debate activities, however, continued to be populated by its male members exclusively and, not surprisingly, when the question of "Should the Elective Franchise be Conferred on Women" was debated on 10 August 1871, the Minutes record that it was decided in the negative.

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One thing does seem certain. When the library went into abeyance in 1845 the book collection was scattered, whether through intention or misappropriation is not clear

from the Minutes. However, current library director Linda Crawford related during a 1991 interview that it is her understanding that "they took the books and farmed them out during the war." She said she could not corroborate the notion with documentation but pointed out that it is in line with measures taken by other communities to protect their resources during the war. In any case, the Minutes of 24 August 1871 record that R. E. Craig, the Association's librarian, had had a "notice put in one of the city papers requesting all persons having any of the books in their possession to return them to the Association."

While members of the Association were active in following and debating national events, they did not ignore the home scene. In 1871, the Mobile and Northwest Railroad was proposing to bring its rails through Yazoo County and was asking the citizens of the county to underwrite the project in the amount of \$600,000. On 7 September of that year the Association debated the issue and decided that the citizens should subscribe to the requested amount. With so much money at stake, it is easy to see how matters could get out of hand, and apparently they did. At this same meeting the Association unanimously adopted a resolution limiting debate to a maximum of one hour, the time to be divided as follows: first speaker for the affirmative speaks for ten minutes, followed by first speaker for the negative with the same amount of time; second speaker for the affirmative



speaks for fifteen minutes, followed by second speaker for the negative with the same amount of time; finally, the first speaker for the affirmative has an additional five minutes to present, followed by the first speaker for the negative with an equal amount of time.

In 1873 the Association apparently was still attempting to rebuild its collection of books. The Minutes for 8 May of that year record that W. H. Luse, vice president of the Association, had been authorized to receive "subscriptions, books, money or other needed assistance as donations." The Association was even willing to take books on loan with the stipulation that the lender had to agree to put them in the Association's possession for a period of "not less than twelve months..." At this same meeting the Association dictated that all applications for membership must be accompanied by "the initiation fee of fifty cents and that no name be considered until the sum is paid." In a further effort to increase revenues, the Association voted to have each member of the Association pay his monthly dues of 20 cents on a regular basis. In an apparent effort to enforce the previous dictate, the Association advised its secretary that at the end of each meeting "the members shall be called upon to pay their monthly dues...[so] that those who have not paid for the current month may have the opportunity of doing so." Clearly, the Association was in need of cash at a time when, due to the economic crush of reconstruction,

there was not much cash to be had.

At the meeting of 15 May 1873 the members were again solicited for additional support and 19 members contributed either money or books, the highest money donation being \$5 and the highest in-kind donation being five volumes. However, the Association's concern was not just for its own well being. The minutes of 9 October 1873 record that a debate for which fifty cents admission was charged was held at the courthouse to raise money for charity. This action was taken in the midst of one of the worst depressions of the latter half of the nineteenth century. However, the road to reestablishing the library was not always smooth as is indicated by the Minutes of 17 June 1874, which opened with the following cryptic statement: "After an adjournment of several months the society assembled on June 17th 74."

That the members of the Association no longer felt the political rein of Reconstruction bosses is evident in some of the debate topics questioning the established government undertaken about this time. At the above-referenced meeting which occurred after a hiatus of several months, the members debated the question, "Will the Constitution of the U.S. survive the present tendency toward the centralization of power in the federal government?" Though the issue was debated, no decision was given. On 25 June 1874 the disputants considered whether secession from the union was an expedient policy in retrospect, and the question was

decided in the negative. At the following meeting, 4 July 1874, the Association scheduled a debate on the topic: "Would it be advisable to change our present form of government into a constitutional monarchy?"

By October of 1874 the organization was beginning to lose steam again. The first regularly scheduled meeting of that month had to be canceled due to lack of attendance. Those present decided that due to "coldness and the increase in business" that further meetings should be postponed until March of the following year.

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(NOTE: Before the Yazoo Library Association moved into the splendid beaux arts building it currently occupies in Triangle Park, its headquarters were located in a two-story building on Lot No. 76 in Yazoo City. At various times during the late nineteenth century all or part of the building was leased to the Yazoo City schools. DeCell and Pritchard (1976) note that the building was also used as collateral when the Association needed to raise money. This contention is borne out by the Minutes of 28 October 1890 where a proposal to use the building as collateral for a loan was discussed.)

The year 1890 found the Association still struggling to hold onto its viability as an institution, even though its leadership at this time included some of the most prominent men in the city; among their ranks were Judge Robert Bowman;

Fountain Barksdale, one of the original fourteen founders and an esteemed local businessman; and Dr. W.Y. Gadberry, a local physician and politician. Bowman, who appears to have been determined to keep the Association going, made a motion at the 28 October 1890 meeting that a committee composed of the Association's officers (Bowman was president) be empowered to borrow \$1,250, using the Association's building as collateral. Presumably, Bowman wanted the funds to purchase books for the library, the original book collection having been dispersed during the Civil War. The absence of the book collection was bemoaned at various times in the Minutes, and, as later events were to prove, the development of a book collection provided an impetus for greater community participation in the Association. Another dedicated member who was instrumental in getting the Association going again, according to Cunningham, was Richard Abbey. "The reorganization of 1890 was largely due to the zeal of Reverend Dr. Abbey, whose term of service had been a very long one, and in the early days he had again and again lectured for the benefit of the Association" (Yazoo Library Association, p. 5).

The Association had always enjoyed amicable relations with the city school system, leasing all or part of the building to various different units of the school at various different times. However, these amicable relations turned decidedly sour on 31 March 1891 when the school system

leaders tried to claim ownership of the building. The Association, which was heavily populated by lawyers and judges, lost no time in responding. Bowman, the Association's president and a highly esteemed jurist, was commissioned to "proceed at once to take such steps and institute in the name of this Association such legal proceedings as in his judgement may be necessary" to reclaim the Association's property. Fountain Barksdale and R. Abbey, the town's Methodist minister, were appointed to collect money for the legal defense.

However, no sooner had the members of the Association reclaimed the property than they decided to sell it. At a meeting on 28 March of 1892 the members appointed a committee to investigate the possibilities of liquidating the property to get out from under the property tax burden and, as it turned out later, to generate capital to be invested in a book collection. The issue continued to be discussed for the remainder of 1892 as the Association attempted to locate a suitable purchaser. Part of the problem seems to derive from the building being jointly owned by the Association and the Masons (the building is actually referred to in some of the literature as the Masonic Building). The two groups met off and on during this period, attempting to work out a suitable arrangement for selling the property and dividing the profits. At an Association meeting on 2 January 1893, the value of the

property was set at \$2,500, with the Library Association owning three-fifths of the value and the Masons owning two-fifths. During the same meeting, it was reported that the city schools had offered the Association a room free of charge for the maintenance of the library, presumably for the benefit that would accrue to the school's students by having a library on site. Finally, at a meeting on 5 June 1893, with the promise of a new meeting site assured, the Association and the Masons came to terms, with the Masons agreeing to pay the Association \$1,500 (the amount equal to three-fifths of the building's \$2,500 value).

The sale of the property and the windfall of \$1,500 it brought marks the second watershed for the Association during this period. Up until this time the library's book collection had consisted of the few volumes that could be purchased with the irregularly paid dues and of odd volumes donated by the members. However, the \$1,500 offered the members the opportunity of creating a real library for which books were systematically purchased. On the occasion of the sale the Association passed a resolution declaring that "the money obtained after paying the just debts of this Association be invested in a library for its use in such amounts and at such times as the Association shall judge best." The Association also appointed a five-member Library Committee and charged it with the responsibility of investing the \$1,500 in a book collection and instructed it

to "provide for taking care of the same, as well as formulating rules and regulations for their use by the members of the Association." At this same meeting the Association, in an action presaging its future as a public library, voted to grant full membership rights to the highest male and female grades in the public school as well as in the Catholic Female Seminary.

By the meeting of 7 August 1893 the Library Committee could report that shelving had been installed in the two rooms allotted them in the city public schools. In the meantime, the Association was holding its regular meetings in the Mayor's office, another indication of the connections of the Association members and the status accorded the library in the community. At the meeting on 7 August 1893 the Association empowered the Library Committee to transact business related to the library so long as three of the four members were present. This delegation of authority prefigures the emergence of the modern-day Board of Control to which the Association now delegates its authority.

Beginning on 4 September 1893, the Association met in its new rooms in the school house, and, as the business of really running a library began to crowd in, the lyceum functions of the Association began dropping by the wayside. There is no further mention of debates until 20 November 1894, when the Association contracted with the Red Path Lyceum Bureau to present a "series of entertainments."

Meetings at this point were more concerned with the purchase of furniture and other items necessary to run a library properly. In fact, the Association's last debate of this era occurred in 1892 and concerned an issue of growing concern locally. In the late 1880's and early 1890's Mississippi was beginning to feel some of the reform impulses that would soon grip the nation in the form first of Populism and later of Progressivism. One of the forms that this took was the rise of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and concurrent calls for prohibition. John K. Betterworth (1973) notes in his essay, "The Reawakening of Society and Cultural Life, 1865-1890," that the work of the Union was so effective that Mississippi in 1886 passed a local-option law, "which made it possible for a county to adopt prohibition by a local vote instead of by legislative enactment" (p. 631). The Association, continuing to reflect an interest in state and local affairs, undertook a consideration of the issue on 1 August 1892, and, after "able argument" on both sides of the issue, it was decided that prohibition would not be "practical and beneficial" to the Yazoo community. That these debates were a popular feature of the Association is demonstrated by two members who refused to pay their dues at the 13 December 1892 meeting, giving as their reasons the Association's failure to provide debates for its members.

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The Association's new location and revitalized book collection resulted in a surge in membership. Seventeen new male members were initiated and paid fees of fifty cents each; two female members were initiated (this is the first time females are referred to as other than auxiliary members) at fees of twenty-five cents each. In an apparent effort to encourage even more participation, Fountain Barksdale had a motion passed that allowed former members who had been suspended for non-payment of dues to be readmitted without penalty. The Association also specified that the duties of the librarian be clearly specified by a committee appointed to draft rules and regulations for the new library rooms. Clearly, the Association was ready to move forward.

By the next meeting the Association had its first report of the efforts of the Library Committee. Periodicals and papers valued at \$95.25 had been purchased. It was the first of a long line of reports to the Association regarding the operation of the library, which reports are continuing today. Interest in the library continued to run high, with as many as 20 new members being initiated at some meetings (Minutes 18 October 1893). At the meeting of 18 October 1893 the Association took an action which by today's open standards is amusingly stereotypical. The librarian was instructed to display cards in the reading rooms "bearing the words - 'No Talking Allowed'." At the same meeting it

was reported that 312 new volumes had been purchased from Leggett Brothers in New York. The Association was also dissatisfied with its secretary, a paid employee, for not keeping the books properly accessioned and authorized the Governing Committee (i.e., the Library Committee) to "employ another person to fill the duties of his office" should he fail to bring his performance into line with expectations.

By 17 April 1894 the Governing Committee was able to report that "968 books representing the standard literature of the English speaking peoples of the age and embracing history, biography, science, and fiction" had been purchased at a cost of \$631.34. The library had also received as a donation from a member the 100-plus volume set of the Official Records of the War of the Rebellion, still a standard work today in most university libraries. Another member, Mrs. M. A. Harrison, presented the library with 30 volumes of Harper's Classical Library. The secretary reported 132 members on the rolls in good standing, a great increase over the average of 14 members who attended early meetings of the Association. The library was not only solvent, it was growing in membership and developing a large and impressive collection of books. One undated entry in the Minutes between the entries for 18 September 1894 and 20 November 1894 (so, presumably, the October meeting) records that during one 17-day reporting period, 800 persons used the library. Providing further evidence of the

Association's evolution from a closed society to an agency sponsoring a quasi-public library, on 21 May 1895 the Association voted to grant library privileges to anyone upon the payment of a one dollar annual fee.

By 1895 patronage at the library had increased, and the Minutes of virtually every meeting of the Association report new members. At the meeting of 19 February 1895 there were nine new members inducted and on 16 April of the same year seven more new members were inducted, one of whom was a "maiden lady." Library patronage increased so much, in fact, that the librarian asked for an increase in his salary because of the demands of serving the growing membership. (His salary was \$15 per month.) In response to this request the Governing Committee recommended that his salary remain the same but that he be given a five percent commission on all collections. At this time the librarian appears to have been little more than a clerk responsible for executing the directives of the Association's Governing Committee to whom he was responsible. In fact, the Governing Committee controlled the library's operations to the extent that the librarian could not even approve requests for membership. He received the signed applications and forwarded them on to the Governing Committee for "approval of the same by a majority vote of the Committee" (Minutes 17 March 1896). This assessment is corroborated by Shera (1949) who notes in his discussion of social libraries that

While the collections were small, the librarian was only a member of the group who was delegated as custodian. His duties involved little expenditure of time or attention. As the collection grew, the responsibilities became greater, and finally someone was *hired* to do the work, but authority and responsibility were retained by the group which generally acted through a governing chapter board (p. 107).

In the same paragraph, Shera notes that the librarian at this time was "little more than a glorified janitor, a 'keeper' in the most elementary sense."

As a sign of the Association's continuing health and prosperity, the Association on 17 December 1896 created a Board of Trustees whose responsibility it was both to recruit members and to care for the Association's endowment. By 15 December 1896 members of the newly created committee were able to report to the Association that they had collected more than \$1,000 from various members, including \$250 each from General and Mrs. Benjamin S. Ricks. About this time the library's one surviving printed catalog was published. The catalog is important enough in understanding the ethos of the Yazoo Library Association in the nineteenth century and its similarity to other social libraries of the day that it merits having its own identified section within this subchapter.

#### Catalogue of the Yazoo Library Association

By 1898 the library's collection had been developed to the point that the Association published a catalog of its

holdings. The catalog indexes the books to sections and shelves. The classification system is not explained and, there is no clear pattern discernable from the section/shelf information, leaving a somewhat vague impression of the organization of the library. The organization of the catalog itself, however, is very clear. It divides the collection into the following major areas: fiction; memoirs; history; essays; biography; science, philosophy, and art; religious; books of travel; classical; and books of reference.

In one of the segments of "Ricks Looks at Books," the local television show she hosted about the library, Harriet DeCell noted that most of the books from this collection have been removed from the library's regular collection and are kept separately in an historical room. This was done, she said, because many of the books themselves "appear to be valuable" and because of what the collection as a whole means for the study of nineteenth century intellectual life in Yazoo City. Also appearing with her on the show were John Pilkington, professor of literature from the University of Mississippi, and Antonio Rodriguez-Buckingham, professor of library science at the University of Southern Mississippi. Pilkington suggested that the collection reflects in its holdings the ideals of nineteenth century education, which emphasized religion, classics, and history. Rodriguez-Buckingham noted that many of the books have

personal book plates or are inscribed with personal names, indicating that they were donated to the library out of personal collections. Consequently, he said, the collection is also a good index to the reading habits and intellectual vitality of the community.

In his study of reading habits in the Ohio Valley prior to 1850, Haynes McMullen (1971) posits that collections in libraries are an appropriate index to the intellectual vitality of a community; he then proceeds to analyze the intellectual interests of the Ohio Valley based on the published catalogs of social libraries. McMullen was able to draw four major conclusions from his examination of these catalogs. First, he found that small collections tended to rely almost exclusively on standard works, while the "larger ones contained lighter or more current material as well" (p. 62). Second, he found the collections to be well balanced, with history, biography, fiction, and poetry being well represented; religion, ethics, science, and technology were present but in fewer numbers; there were virtually no books of plays. Third, there was a predominance of works by European authors, with American authors increasing in representation as the years progressed. Finally, there were virtually no books in foreign language, though there were some translations from classics and the major European languages.

The Yazoo Library Association, based on an analysis of its 1898 Catalogue (the only pre-twentieth century catalog for the Association that can be located), reflects most of McMullen's findings with a few exceptions. The collection, which included in excess of 1,700 titles, had a healthy number of classical works in the original languages, including works by Cicero, Herodotus, Homer, Horace, Livy, Pindar, Plutarch, Thucydides, and Xenophon. Further, the "Books of Reference" included Anthon's Classical Dictionary, Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities, Lempriere's Classical Dictionary, and the Greek and English Lexicon. Another exception to his findings is the presence of drama by, among others, Thucydides, William Shakespeare, and Oliver Goldsmith. The library also included a number of works of agriculture, including books on various vegetables and dairying.

In its interest in the classics, the Yazoo library seems to have had much in common with Franklin's Philadelphia Library Company. In her study of that library, Margaret Korty (1971) found that the library's first book order included a number of items also held by the Yazoo library, including Plutarch's Lives and the works of Homer and Virgil.

Other differences between the Yazoo Library Association collection and other social library collections were regional. The Yazoo City library reflected the culture and

the interests of its location in its collection, and that reflection was different from most of the other social libraries documented in American library history as they were, for the most part, not of this region. Not surprisingly, there are a number of volumes on the Civil War, including the memoirs of Jefferson Davis, History of the Civil War in America by the Comte de Paris, and the Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government by Jefferson Davis. Perhaps due to the Association's tradition of debating both sides of issues, the collection also includes the memoirs of both Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman. That the collection attempted to appeal to those "lighter and more current" (p. 62) interests recorded by McMullen (1971) is documented by an examination of the library's fiction collection against best seller lists of the day. According to Hackett and Burke (1977), best seller lists began appearing in 1895. Of the 10 best sellers in 1895, the library's 1898 catalog lists four: Ian Maclaren's Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush, George du Maurier's Trilby, Richard Harding Davis' Princess Aline, and Anthony Hope's Prisoner of Zenda. From the 1896 list there are another three titles (four titles, if one counts Maclaren's book which shows up on the 1895 list also): Frances Hodgson Burnett's A Lady of Quality, Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware, and Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage. The 1897 list includes five titles: Henryk Sienkiewicz's Quo Vadis, Flora



Annie Steel's On the Face of the Waters, Anthony Hope's Phroso, Hall Caine's The Christian, and J. M. Barrie's Sentimental Tommy.

In addition to their interest in current fiction, the patrons of the Yazoo Library Association were also apparently interested in the scientific and aesthetic debates that characterized late nineteenth century America. Though his controversial On the Origin of Species is not in the 1898 catalog, many of Charles Darwin's other works are, including some, such as The Descent of Man, that expand upon the ideas put forth in Origin. The collection also contained 35 of John Ruskin's 40-plus volumes of criticism, essays, history, poetry, diaries, fiction, and autobiography. Twentieth Century Literary Criticism characterizes Ruskin as "one of the Victorian era's most prominent and influential critics of art and society..." (p. 256).

Shera's research indicates that Yazoo City's entrance fee of \$1.00 and annual dues of .25 were in line with those in New England. Of 25 libraries surveyed that charged entrance fees, 16 -- i.e., the vast majority -- had entrance fees in the \$1-\$4 range. Of the 90 surveyed that assessed annual dues, 49 (once again, the vast majority) charged under \$1.

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As the period under consideration drew to a close there was evidence of considerable activity in the Association. The membership continued to climb, and at the 21 March 1899 meeting it was reported to be at 178 people. The period ended on one of the highest points of its history when Mrs. Fanny J. Ricks whose husband, General Benjamin Ricks, had just died, offered to build the Association a home befitting its role in the community; the library's new home would be a memorial to her late husband and would be known simply as "B. S. Ricks Memorial." Under the terms of her offer Mrs. Ricks was to have total control of the building's design which was to cost "not less than \$20,000" and "be built of brick or stone or both in as durable a manner as may be" (Minutes 14 November 1900). Mrs. Ricks further stipulated that she be made a permanent member of the Association's Board of Control and that land for the building should be donated by the city. It took an act of the legislature to empower the city to give land to a private association, but the needed legislation was eventually passed and the property was officially deeded over in July of the following year (Minutes 2 July 1901). The architect chosen for the project was Alfred Zucker, a German-born architect who had studied at the Berlin Academy. He had spent a number of years working in Texas and Mississippi before establishing a practice in New York. He had even been for a while the architect in charge of state buildings in Mississippi,

during which time he designed several court houses and university buildings (Kestenbaum, 1982, P. 476). The Association which for so long had struggled to survive and to maintain quarters was about to have a real home.

From the Heights to the Depths and Back Again: 1901-1950

Many scholars take 1901 to be the end of the nineteenth century, for it was during this year that Queen Victoria died, ending a reign of more than 60 years and officially bringing to a close the "Victorian" era. It was a turning point for England as this island nation laid to rest a monarch who symbolized the power, the pride, the perseverance that had turned a nation of shopkeepers into the rulers of the world. In his biographical sketch of the monarch, Walter L. Arnstein (1988) notes that "By the time of her death at Osborne on January 22, 1901, she had become a symbol of empire, of British power...and personal morality. Understandably, her death...seemed to mark the end not only of an individual but also of an age" (p. 836-837). This was also the year that the first prizes funded by Alfred Nobel, the Scandinavian scientist who developed dynamite, were awarded. It was an epochal year on the international scene as well as in the history of Yazoo City, Mississippi. During this year the city's most spectacular building -- constructed at a cost of more than \$20,000 -- was being completed. The Association, which had survived civil war, economic upheaval, and the scourge of Yellow

Fever, was finally going to have a suitable home. It had begun its existence in rented rooms and had then moved to an inadequate building jointly owned with the Masons. Financial hardships forced the Association to sell its interest in the Masonic Building and move into rooms provided by the city schools in exchange for that institution's students being allowed to use the book collection. But, now, the library had a benefactress and the course of its progress was about to change directions radically.

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In the same sense that Queen Victoria had set the standard for and left her mark on British society, so too did Mrs. Ricks set a standard for and leave a mark on Yazoo society. In her fine biographical sketch of the Ricks family, Susie Bull (1973), assistant librarian at Ricks Memorial Library, reports that while Ricks was a shrewd businesswoman, she was also "a gracious and charming person," who, in the manner of many genteel southern ladies of the Victorian era, maintained an "at home" (p. 8) day each week when she formally received callers. The homes she maintained were, by all accounts, quite splendid. The plantation home at "Belle Prairie," General Ricks' 18,000-acre farm in Yazoo County, is not described, but, given the standard set for plantation dwellings in such nearby rival towns as Natchez, one can assume that the home was of

generous proportions. Bull does describe the town house as a two-story dwelling on Main Street surrounded by "a beautifully kept garden with a fountain" (pp. 7-8). The Yazoo Sentinel, in a front-page article on 3 January 1901 announcing Ricks intention of building the library, describes her town home as "an expression of exquisite taste."

Although she was very generous to the Association, Ricks' philanthropic interests were not restricted to the library in Yazoo City. On the occasion of her death the Semi-Weekly Sentinel, in its 6 November 1918 issue, reminded readers in a front page article that after the devastating fire of 1904 that decimated most of downtown Yazoo City, including her own home (but, fortunately, sparing the new library), Ricks proved to be strong when "others were in doubt and faltered." Rather than bemoan the city's fate, she immediately "began the task of rebuilding, displaying her characteristic courage and optimism." Three days later, the same paper printed the text of her will, revealing that one of the two-story structures she had erected after the fire had been left to the library for the furtherance of its mission. In his history of the University of Mississippi, Allen Cabanise (1971) notes that Ricks underwrote the cost of that university's summer schools from 1900 to 1903. Her subsequent endowments to the school were of such a magnitude that the first girls' dormitory built on the Oxford,

Mississippi campus was named in her honor. Linda Crawford, director of Ricks Memorial Library, expanded upon Ricks philanthropic interests during a 1991 interview, explaining that she regularly made scholarships available to Yazoo City girls and that she and General Ricks were also benefactors of the opera house. Ricks was, by all the available evidence, quite rich; she was also quite generous. In her own more circumspect way, she reflected many of the same characteristics of the British monarch who died the same year that Ricks created her most enduring memorial.

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The building that was unveiled in 1901 was not dedicated officially until 1 January 1902. It was, and is, a magnificent structure. The author of an undated and unsigned manuscript titled Yazoo Library Association and located in the vertical file at Ricks Memorial Library describes the building, somewhat effusively, as "a thing of beauty. It is more than that, it is what is rarely seen, a perfect gem" (p. 7). The Yazoo Sentinel of 3 January 1901 carried a front page article describing the planned building. It was to be of "light gray brick and ivory white terra cotta, with metal roof...The inside finishing will be marble wainscoting, plastered walls and ceilings." The library was to be lighted throughout by electricity and was heralded as being "practically a fire-proof building" (p. 1). The "fire-proof" claim was to be dramatically borne out

three years later when, according to DeCell and Pritchard (1976), "virtually all the business district burned...and several residential blocks as well" (p. 361).

Linda Crawford, in a 1991 interview, noted that Ricks was fascinated by circular designs; this fascination was evident in the final design of the library, which features a semi-circular front portico as well as a semi-circular main reading room. The original circulation desk, which has since been cut down in size, was of full-circle design and was bathed in variegated light from a semi-circular stained-glass window in the roof directly above it. A few of the building's windows are oval, and all the others are topped by fanlights (i.e., semicircular windows). Bull notes that Ricks' fascination with circles extended well beyond the library. She donated land to the city and provided funds for its development into a circular park. When General Ricks died, she had a circular coping put around the grave site. Toward the end of her life, Ricks moved to "an apple farm near Tryon and Columbus, North Carolina" (Bull, 1973, p. 13); however, she continued to support the library even though she no longer lived in Yazoo City. The Librarian's annual report for 1912 refers to her support as "generous."

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Evaluating Fanny Ricks' activities in retrospect, it appears that she may have been motivated by at least two closely related phenomena in American society at the time:

progressivism and philanthropy. Progressivism grew up in response to the ills created by industrialism, and, though it is most often associated with urban affairs, it was certainly not exclusively so. In their monograph on progressivism, Arthus S. Link and Richard L. McCormick (1983) note that "the South was the center of the most dramatic progressive effort to improve educational standards" (1983, p. 90). In his monograph on library development, Ditzion (1947) attributes the emergence of the modern-day public library to the middle-class leaders who, in the spirit of progressivism, took it as their bounden duty to provide economic and educational (including libraries) opportunities to the common people. This educational progressivism was not restricted just to schools, per se, as Andrew Carnegie in his endowment of public libraries demonstrated. There was certainly no dearth of models for library philanthropy to encourage Ricks. The names of Astor, Lenox, Pratt and others were associated in the national press of the day with such philanthropy.

There are various motives for the founding of libraries, as Martha J. Klopfenstein concluded in her study of the subject in 1955. Among those she identified were patriotism, local pride, practicality, egotism, charity, religion, democracy, and humanitarianism. In his social history of the first half of this century in America, Dwight



Drummond (1947) notes that the philanthropic impulse, fueled by a combination of social Darwinism and noblesse oblige, was quite prevalent around the turn of the century. And though he suggests that one might question the motives of some of the philanthropists, the end result was much the same, despite their motives. According to Drummond, the philanthropists believed that

...they had a moral obligation to dispense their wealth for the benefit of humanity, and they did so in generous fashion. Their philosophy, that superior intelligence had given them wealth and the same superior intelligence enabled them to spend it more wisely than their less fortunate brethren belonged to a passing age, but their benefactions were for the most part wisely chosen and hastened the progress of sweeping reforms (pp. 19-20).

Whatever her motives -- and there is every reason to believe from the available literature that they were of the highest order -- Ricks left a legacy that endures until this day.

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The history of the library during the first 60 years of this century was remarkable in a couple of ways. First, there were only two librarians during this period: Annie (Mrs. Fountain) Barksdale, wife of one of the original founders, who served from 1902 until 1922, and Mrs. M. P. Derden, who served from 1922 until 1962. From the time the library sold its interest in the Masonic building and invested the profits in a book collection, the library took

on an increasingly institutional look. It had paid employees; it maintained regular hours; and there was an increasing volume of reports generated by the members and staff responsible for running the institution. With the dedication of the new library in 1902, the Association began occupying what was then and is today one of the most -- if not, the most -- architecturally important buildings in the city. With the book collection, the Association had taken on an intellectual and cultural responsibility toward the community. Now, as conservators of a functional work of art, the Association was assuming an artistic role as well. Mrs. Barksdale was certainly aware of the important role the Association had been called upon to play in the community. In her annual report to the Library Association in 1910, (which is included with the Minutes of 20 December that year) she noted that:

As a local institution that has enjoyed a chartered existence of more than seventy years, weathering the vicissitudes of panics, pestilence, and civil war, the Yazoo Library Association has made, and continues to make, its presence a beneficent influence in the lives of our people...We recognize it as one of the functions of a library to foster and direct the reading of good literature, and in this respect it is believed that the Yazoo Library Association is meeting with success.

During this same period, the Association's Board of Control was increasingly taking the lead in the day-to-day running of the library. In the early days all Association

decisions had been determined by majority vote of members present; however, the Association could not legally transact business unless a quorum was present. With the lure of the permanent book collection, the Association's ranks had swelled, and the logistics of finding a place and time to assemble a quorum were becoming increasingly difficult. The Association partially dealt with this problem in 1898 by amending the by-laws (which are kept as an appendix to the Association's Minutes book) to make the presence of nine members constitute a quorum. The dangers in such a rule are obvious. Nine disgruntled members could easily assemble themselves as a quorum and wreak havoc in the organization. Further, the larger the organization became, the less likely would a random gathering of nine persons be able to determine the sense of the organization. The answer, which evolved over time, was to delegate responsibility for transacting the business of the library to a group specifically identified for this purpose. First, as has already been noted, this was the Library Committee. Out of this committee grew what is today the Board of Control. The pattern of administration today is for the Board of Control to hire a professional librarian, and, while the Board of Control functions as a check on potential abuse or irregularities in the office of the librarian, its practical role in the ordinary course of events is a cooperative one, with the professional librarian taking the lead and the

initiative in most matters. In a 1991 interview, former library director Harriet DeCell discussed the need to "educate board members" about their roles, which include a variety of things such as communicating with the community and supporting the work of the library and the librarian. Current library director Linda Crawford, explained during a 1991 interview that membership on the library Board of Control is no longer prestigious; it is something that responsible citizens are willing to do if recruited by the librarian. "It's not a prestige thing at all. It's something that people do...they do it because it's a service they feel they have to do," explained Crawford. It is a very collegial affair, with the Board of Control hiring the librarian and the librarian, in turn, "hiring" the members of the Board of Control.

The situation, however, was very different in the early part of the century. Rather than hire professional librarians, the Board of Control hired persons from within the community who had an interest in the library. The first librarian whom it hired to run the new Ricks Memorial Library was Barksdale, who, with her husband, was one of the library's most ardent supporters. In fact, Fountain Barksdale was so venerated by the Yazoo Library Association that at its meeting on 3 October 1892, he was honored by being named the Association's first lifetime member. Derden, the second librarian to be in charge of Ricks

Memorial Library, was the daughter of a close friend of Mrs. Ricks'. As a child, Derden had lived with Mrs. Ricks for a time.

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During the period under consideration the library was characterized by slow but steady growth as the established institution moved into a maturing pattern. No longer was it trying to establish itself; no longer was it scrambling to make ends meet or find a place to hold meetings. It was settling into the business of being a town library, and though its growth was steady, it was not sufficient to satisfy Mrs. Barksdale who saw in the institution the potential for improving, among other things, the town's moral standards. In her annual report to the Association on 14 December 1909 she laments the slow growth:

It seems that 220 is a very small membership for a town the size of Yazoo City. A library is an essential part of a broad system of education, and we want ours to furnish more practice in reading for the little folks at school; to give the boys and girls who have learned to read a taste for wholesome literature that informs and inspires; to be a center for an intellectual and practical activity that will leaven the whole community, and make healthful and uplifting themes the burden of common thought, substituting by natural methods clean conversation and literature for petty gossip, scandal, and oral and printed teachings in vice...

During this period the library's book collection was steadily growing. During 1909, 594 books were added to the collection at a cost of \$576.29. The membership was 222, a net growth of two after new members were added and resignations and deaths were subtracted. By 1910 they had added 562 books at a cost of \$528.40, and its membership increased by a net of 12.

During this same period the relationship with the city schools was continuing to grow stronger. In 1904 the city schools had built a large new school next door to the library, and, according to DeCell, the school actually "counted the books in Ricks Memorial Library as its school library for the purposes of accreditation" (1991). In her annual report of 1910 Barksdale noted that "the pupils of the white schools of the city are more than ever using the books in the library in connection with literary and historical lessons..."

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That the library saw itself as an association to which one must pay to belong is a recurring theme throughout the Minutes of the period. In her annual report for 1909, Barksdale noted that "some members are slow about paying their bills or dues, but there are very few, if any, who may not be expected to pay up all arrears." Barksdale frequently pointed out in her reports to the Association that at four dollars for annual membership in the

Association and one dollar for annual book privileges, the library was an excellent value. (Holders of book privileges were non-members who paid to gain access to the library's collection.) Also, for that amount of money the reading public was given generous access to the facilities; the library was open six days a week from 9:00 a.m. to 10 p.m. On Sundays it closed at 6 p.m. (presumably it opened after the church hour, but the Minutes do not state that specifically) (Minutes, 5 November 1907).

During this period the Association developed a financial relationship with the city that could be built on in the future as the library moved toward public status. When the Association moved into the Ricks Memorial Building the city began underwriting its expenses by \$50 per month. When, in 1907, it looked as if the council might not pass the annual appropriation, the library complained that "the loss of the \$50 per month would seriously cripple the library" (Minutes, 5 November 1907) and pointed out the extent and variety of services the Association provided to the community, particularly to the school children. The appropriation passed by a vote of five-to-four. However, it was too close for comfort, and the Association urged its members to lobby the council for the continuance of the appropriation on the basis that "the community at large derives a benefit therefrom at least equal to the amount appropriated" (Minutes, 5 November 1907). Apparently the

lobbying worked for the Minutes do not again refer to the appropriation being in jeopardy. Almost one full year later, on 3 November 1908, the Library Association marked a sad milestone when the death of Fountain Barksdale, "the last charter member of the Library Association," was recorded.

However, the library's financial problems were far from over. In the early part of the century Mississippi was still almost totally agricultural, and the financial health of towns like Yazoo City was directly dependent on the financial health of the farmer. In 1912 that health declined into illness with a boll weevil plague on the area's cotton crops. Reporting on the Association's financial condition, Barksdale noted that the plague seems "to overshadow the financial prospects of the country" and reported that the Association's income was "not so large as might be expected" (Minutes, 29 February 1912). From its beginning the Association had been concerned about involving as many persons as possible in the life of the library. Now, with declining revenues this seemed more important than ever, and the Association began trying to attract more county residents to the library. A list of potential members living in the county was prepared, and each person on the list received a letter of invitation along with a card entitling the bearer to use the library free of charge for 60 days (Minutes 29 February 1912). Although generating



less response than was hoped, the letter is important in illustrating the library's ongoing efforts to communicate with its public and be responsive to identified needs.

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During the First World War and the years surrounding it the Association went into decline as the interest and time of the members were consumed by the war effort. However, under the leadership of Albert Martin, the Association was reorganized with renewed enthusiasm in 1922. In his annual address to the Association on 24 May 1923, Martin reflected on his year as president and extolled the virtues of the organization which, by virtue of having been in existence for 85 years, was the "oldest institution in Yazoo City." He noted that the Association had observed a milestone when Annie Barksdale had retired in 1922 after 20 years of service. By now the B. S. Ricks Memorial Library was old enough to need costly repairs, including a new roof and furnace. As usual, the Association was in need of money. Striking a somewhat humorous note in his appeal, Martin told the Association that "there exists a heresy in this city that the Library has plenty of money. I don't know who started it, but it isn't true." According to Martin, the Association derived its income from four sources: \$50 a month from the city; \$50 a month rent on a building Ricks left the Association in her will; interest from "a few small trust funds;" (Minutes, 24 May 1923) and dues from 243

members. His rallying cry was for an increase in funds, and the most obvious way of doing this, he said, was through an increase in membership. He contended that the Association should have at least 500 members. In an obvious effort to generate more community involvement in the library and, hence, more revenue, he noted that the use of the library's meeting room had recently been made available to the newly-formed Women's Book Club and suggested that it was available to other community groups. The Minutes have other suggestions of cash flow problems at the library. On 20 August 1924 the librarians were instructed to strike from the books anyone's name whose dues were in arrears. Somewhat earlier (9 May 1922) the librarians were promised a bounty of \$1 for each new member they recruited. The Minutes of 19 June that same year record that the Board of Control had authorized a "publicity campaign to interest the people in the library."

In retrospect, what is amazing about the Library Association is not that it was having financial difficulties, but that a fee-based library could survive at all in the Mississippi of the 1920s, for while the nation was flush and booming, Mississippi was in the economic doldrums. In Mississippi, his history of the state, John Skates (1979) sums up the situation:

In the 1920s, Mississippi was a forgotten state in a forgotten region. Nationally, the 1920s are

usually described as the "roaring twenties." Mississippi hardly roared. Americans in the 1920s were more prosperous than ever before in the nation's history. Mississippians were poor. At a time when material comfort through the mass production of consumer goods became almost a national religion, Mississippians found themselves left out. With a per-capita income of \$396, only one-third the national average, Mississippians little understood the moral arguments in the 1920s over America's worship of material things (pp. 133-134).

Despite the odds, however, the Yazoo Library Association continued to prosper. The great depression took its toll both on the membership and the resources (The Minutes of 28 March 1933 record that the Citizens Bank and Trust Company in which the Association had \$524.56 deposited had failed.), but it was only able to derail the Association for a brief period in the early 1930's when the library had to close due to lack of funds. The closing is noted in the Minutes of 30 March 1933. The inability of the tenant of the library's rental property to pay his rent was the final straw that forced the decision, and the Board of Control voted to close the library until "the financial situation can be relieved." But, as in other troublesome times, the Association proved to have a savior. Mrs. Charlie Clark of Denver, Colorado, had previously lived in Yazoo City and, presumably, been impressed by the library. In any case, when she learned of its closing, she immediately pledged \$400 per year to underwrite its reopening, which it promptly did (Yazoo Library Association, p. 7). The Minutes of 3

April 1933 also record the first instance of the county government contributing; they agreed to appropriate \$25 per month for the library's maintenance.

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There was evidence during this period that the Association was moving more into the mainstream of library matters. The Minutes of 11 August 1926 record that Board Member Mrs. Laura Tucker attended sessions at the School of Instruction in Library Work in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and brought information back regarding the possibility of installing new systems (the report does not specify what kind of systems) to improve services in the library. The Minutes of 23 January 1926 record that the Association voted to join the Mississippi Library Association, and the Minutes for 10 March 1928 record that the Association had voted to join the American Library Association.

By the mid-1930's Roosevelt's New Deal had been implemented, and the Association began to reap the benefits of its various recovery programs, including a staff of workers who were being funded by the Works Progress Administration to catalog the library's book collection. By 1 October 1936 Derden was able to report to the Board of Control that the Works Progress Administration was paying all salaries at the library except hers.

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Possibly because of the Second World War, the Minutes

for the late 1930's and most of the 1940's indicate almost no activity on the part of the Board of Control. Minutes during this time period almost never record any information other than who attended, a statement that business was conducted, and that the meeting adjourned. One exception to this is the entry for 30 July 1948 when it was recorded that the Board "is interested in a long range program looking toward making a free library." The recording secretary for this meeting also noted that the county was making an annual contribution of \$2,200. The era was ending on a decidedly upbeat note.

#### The Decell Era: 1951-Present

Yazoo City's main commercial link to the outside world is state highway number 49 that connects the town with Jackson, some 50 miles Southeast. The Yazoo River is no longer used commercially. Indeed, looking at it today from atop the massive concrete span that connects Yazoo City to the yawning Delta beyond, it is hard to believe there was ever a thriving inland port on its banks; however, an anachronistic port authority continues to attest to the community's former life as a "river town." The railroads came rather late to Yazoo City, but when they arrived in 1876, they arrived with a bang; in 30 years the county's population tripled as "new towns sprang up along the railroad as quickly as the rails themselves were fastened down..." (DeCell & Pritchard, 1976, p. 351). In the mid-

twentieth century, super highways gained the ascendancy, and Yazoo City was passed by; the nearest super highway -- interstate 55 -- is some 35 miles east. Running southeast and northwest, it connects Jackson and Memphis, but does not come near enough to Yazoo City to have a significant commercial impact.

Yazoo City sits right on the edge of the Delta, where that flat pancake-like land abuts the Bluff Hills. Highway 49 skirts the eastern edge of the town, staying well up on the bluff. Jefferson Street connects Highway 49 with Yazoo City's downtown commercial area; its descent down to the delta is precarious and has been the cause of numerous automobile wrecks, particularly in bad weather. Between the highway and downtown is an intervening gulch whose contours are too extreme for easy development. With so much flat, easily developed land lying about there appears to have never been any interest on anyone's part in either filling in the gulch or designing a building that could cope with its steep grades. Covered in that ubiquitous Japanese-imported southern vine, kudzu, it has become a repository of unwanted material culture. Its banks are littered with debris ranging in size from candy wrappers to automobiles, and an abandoned house trailer balances precariously on its edge. Its frame twisted and its outer skin ripped off by some forgotten violence, the trailer's insulation hangs forlornly in shreds, stirring occasionally as delta breezes

forlornly in shreds, stirring occasionally as delta breezes find their way into the gulch. The trailer and its litter-strewn setting are symbolic of the financial hard times the little town has experienced in the latter part of the twentieth century. Like many small Southern towns whose commercial arteries have dried up, Yazoo City, Mississippi is beginning to look a bit frayed around the edges. In North Toward Home Willie Morris (1967) recalls a scene from his childhood which aptly sums up the first impression the town makes on many people:

One afternoon when I was ten years old, lounging in front of the Phillips station on the street which came hell-bent out of the hills...I watched a man and his wife emerge from a Buick with Illinois plates. The woman smoothed out the wrinkles in her dress with her palm, paused for a second to look at the drab vistas of downtown, and whispered, "My God!" (p. 4).

The scene depicted by Morris was Yazoo City of the early 1950's. It was the town Morris called home; it was also the town that Morris' friend, Herman DeCell called home. In the early 1950's DeCell had just returned to Yazoo City after finishing Harvard Law School. He had come home to begin a law practice and to take up his civic responsibilities, one of which was the stewardship of his hometown library. He exercised this stewardship by agreeing to serve on the Library Association's Board of Control (DeCell, 1991).

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Historical categories are somewhat arbitrary, reflecting as they do the differing interests and dispositions of the historians who create them. For example, a historian interested in politics and power may, after examining the documents of sixteenth century England, declare it to be "the Elizabethan Age." Another historian may interpret the same documents in the light of intellectual and cultural developments and declare the era to be "the Renaissance." Yet another historian interested in literary developments may declare the era to be "The Age of Shakespeare." While such labels and rubrics are a bit arbitrary they are, nonetheless, useful because they help us categorize information so that we can get a handle on the bits and pieces that, together, form the mosaic of history. With this caveat in mind, the era in the history of the Yazoo Library Association that begins in 1950 has been, for the purposes of this research, labeled the "DeCell Era."

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The era under consideration began slowly. Mississippi, like the rest of the nation, was recovering from two wars -- the Second World War and the Korean War -- and the 1950's, under the paternal hand of Eisenhower, were a time of stability and healing. The social revolutions would occur in the next decade, but even though they were more than ten years down the road, there were hints of things to come.



One of those hints was the erudite and gentle Herman DeCell who had come home to Yazoo City in 1950 after graduating from Harvard Law School. He could have joined the majority of his classmates in seeking an almost sure fortune as a paid legal gun on Wall Street or in the corridors of the nation's capitol. Instead he chose simply to return home. "I felt I ought to leave the world a better place, and I felt I could do that more effectively here than in other places," he explained to USA Today reporter Gregory Katz toward the end of his career. Not long after returning home, Herman met and married Harriet. In a 1991 interview, Harriet recalled that it was through Herman that "I learned something of the library's problems." When she joined the Junior Auxiliary a few years later part of her initiation process was to identify civic projects for the auxiliary. Harriet lost no time in bringing the force of this powerful local women's organization to bear on the library. She organized a library committee within the auxiliary, and the group raised \$10,000 to refurbish the library's main reading room, developed a local history collection (which Harriet helped catalog), and started a summer reading program for the children. By the time Herman decided to retire from the Board, Harriet was ready for another challenge. "We switched jobs," she recalled with a laugh.

However, Herman never entirely relinquished his connection with the library. He remained involved behind

the scenes, advising Harriet on various issues, and he eventually became a trustee of the state's historical library at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in Jackson. "We were the first institution in Yazoo City to sign form 440 (the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's nondiscrimination form)," Harriet recalled during the 1991 interview. This was in 1965, and Herman worked behind the scenes to ease tensions during this process. At about the same time this was occurring at the library, Herman was organizing a biracial Head Start program. The action served to push the humanitarian agenda forward, and it also took some of the heat off the library. "Herman was a very funny and exuberant man," recalled his friend Willie Morris in a 1987 interview with the Jackson Clarion-Ledger. "He believed that a man should not be judged by the color of his skin, but by the quality of his heart" (Bouchillon, 1987, p. 2).

From the date of her earliest involvement, Harriet was "hooked" on the library. For many years it was a passionate avocation. During her years of teaching at Yazoo High School she always managed to get her classes involved in using the library and even arranged with the school administration for them to have library privileges during the school day for the purposes of doing research. She remained active on the Board and on the Library Committee of the Auxiliary. In the early 1980's the library was without

a director, and someone suggested Harriet's name. She applied and was selected and moved from the Board to the Directorship. For one mad year she zig-zagged back and forth between the University of Mississippi in Oxford and the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, taking courses to earn her masters degree in library science. When she wasn't on the road or in the class or writing library science papers, she was hurrying back to Yazoo City to "keep the top spinning" (1991) at the Ricks Memorial Library. Now, in retirement and living in Jackson, Harriet continues to stay involved with the library in Yazoo City as an occasional volunteer, and she works at the Eudora Welty Public Library in Jackson as a regular volunteer. Harriet was and is a busy lady.

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In the early 1950's when Herman and Harriet were establishing themselves in careers in Yazoo City and just beginning to get involved with the Library, Derden was winding down a long and distinguished career as librarian. She had been named librarian in 1922, and, by the time she finally retired in 1962, she had logged an impressive 40 years of service, interrupted only briefly during the 1930's when the library closed due to lack of funds. The Minutes during this period are filled with Derden's detailed statistics about books and patrons and expenditures. They give no hint of the passion with which she invested herself

in the institution, but the passion was there. Mrs. B. Frank Williams, one of the librarians who succeeded Derden recalled in an interview with the Clarion-Ledger reprinted in the Congressional Record at the direction of U. S. Representative John Bell Williams, that Derden "had held the library together by sheer will power and dedication" during the hard years of the depression. In her 1991 interview, Harriet recalled that "everybody in town had a story about asking for a book and her [Derden] telling them it wasn't nice and they couldn't have it...she kept the sexy books under the circulation desk." In the same interview Harriet also noted with amusement that the organization of the library as late as the early 1950's was something less than scientific. "When I first went there I saw that these two little old ladies had a variety of tables gathered behind the circulation desk -- sort of fanned out from the circulation desk. There were stacks of books on them in no obvious order." Harriet laughed at the memory. "It finally dawned on me what they were doing. They were using these tables to keep the most frequently requested books on so that they wouldn't have to go into the stacks to retrieve them."

A 1962 statement prepared by the library's Board of Control as a part of its request for funding to the United Givers contains a brief tribute to Derden. Noting that she had "served at times without pay," the Board of Control

raised her "devotion to the library" and affirmed that the "community is deeply indebted to her for her contribution to its cultural life" (Yazoo Library Association, 1962, p. 1).

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Mary Louise (Mrs. B. Frank) Williams brought much of the same enthusiasm for programming and public relations that Harriet would bring when she took up the reins some twenty years later. Derden had been a loyal caretaker of the institution; Mrs. Williams, at the encouragement of the Board, began to seriously promote the library in the community. Her annual reports to the Association, which are included in the Association Minutes, are a clue to her efforts. In 1962 she organized an active speakers' bureau to make presentations to area clubs and churches about the library's services, began sending staff members to professional workshops, initiated interlibrary loan services, and initiated a program in the library for exhibiting art and other work produced by students from local schools. In 1963 she was able to record the organization of a Great Books discussion group, a program for displaying library books in the windows of downtown merchants, an arrangement with the garden club to keep fresh flowers in the library's foyer, a library open house, a rotating schedule of exhibits, and a successful National Book Week chaired by Owen Cooper, the widely-respected president of Mississippi Chemical Corporation. The next

year, 1964, saw the inauguration of a weekly library column in the Yazoo Herald, the establishment of a shut-in service run by the Junior Auxiliary, and the debut of a daily radio program on the local station. The name of the program was "Book Notes for Book Worthy Folks." The next year, 1965, her annual report was filled with more good news. Eudora Welty, a Jackson native and nationally known author, read at the library during National Library Week, and U. S. Representative John Bell Williams, a Yazoo County native, had had a lengthy and laudatory article about the library published in the Congressional Record, also in commemoration of National Library Week.

The results of Mary Louise's work were dramatic. Circulation increased by 3,000 the first year, and membership in the library went up by 500. This trend was to continue, though somewhat less dramatically, as her public relations work reached a saturation point. In a 1991 interview, Harriet explained that she and Mary Louise and Lou Mott had all been in the Junior Auxiliary together. Now Mary Louise was director of the library and both Harriet and Lou were on the Board of Control. They formed a strong working relationship ("network," in today's parlance) that pushed the library's social and cultural agendas ahead at a rapid pace. The Minutes for September 1964 record that Harriet had begun investigating "the possibility of rendering library services to the colored citizens of the

county." The result of her investigation was a recommendation to establish a branch in the black high school. Two local leaders of the black community, John E. and Augustus Oates, heard of the library's deliberations, and the Minutes of the Board for October of that year record that the brothers had agreed to transfer to the library for the nominal sum of \$1,500 a parcel of land on Lamar Street near the black school if the library would build a branch there. The Board of Control agreed, but at the Board meeting on 16 March 1965 the decision was made simply to desegregate the library by signing the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's form 404, a declaration by the signers that the library did not discriminate on the basis of race or national origin. In fact, this was a carefully planned decision, and Harriet appears to have been developing the idea of a separate facility for blacks in case the Board failed to approve integration. Before letting the matter come to a vote, Harriet was careful to make sure she had "level heads" on the Board. She coaxed Owen Cooper to be on the board. DeCell (1991) explained that Cooper was under a lot of pressure as president of one of the area's largest companies, but he agreed to lend his name to the desegregation effort if Harriet would let him know which meeting the vote was going to take place at so he could be sure to attend. When the question of desegregation was

called at the meeting, the vote was five in favor and two in opposition. One of the nay voters was the Chairman of the Board, and he immediately resigned. Despite the vote to desegregate, Harriet explained that it was decided to go ahead with the Lamar Branch in an effort to ease the transition.

We were trying to put a branch out there so that it would be one that black people would feel comfortable in and was close to where they were. It was not to make them use that one and the white people use Ricks, but it was to develop library usage out there...Ricks was used by black people from the very beginning as well as Lamar.

The Board of Control Minutes for 19 January 1966 record that the Lamar Street branch was opened with much fanfare, including an art exhibit from nearby Mississippi Valley College.

The library achieved another milestone in 1969 when its services expanded to the point of requiring an addition to the library (Minutes, 15 May 1969). A second addition in 1977, which "houses a community gallery and meeting room," brought the building to its present size (Historic District Walking Tour, n.d., p. 7).

The library achieved yet another milestone in 1972 when the library hired its first professional librarian (i.e., a person with an American Library Association-accredited masters degree in library science). The person hired was David Woodburn, a former journalist from Colorado, who had



gone to library school at midlife (Minutes, 17 May 1972). Under Woodburn's administration, the Association moved even more aggressively into the community, augmenting its bookmobile service with a mail-a-book program (Minutes, 16 March 1974). The effects of having a professional librarian on board soon became apparent in several ways. The Minutes for May of 1974 record that he had begun a community survey to determine community interests and needs. The Minutes for August of that year record that he had developed a weeding policy for ridding the library's collection of outdated or unusable materials. The Minutes for September of that year record he developed a library booth for the county fair.

The Minutes of 28 August 1975 mark an interesting "first" for the Association. The slate of officers put up for the upcoming year included Herman as a trustee of the Association and Harriet as chairman of the Board of Control. The two had frequently worked together as an unofficial team on library projects, but this was the first time they were officially a team. Harriet JoAnne Pritchard, her former teaching partner at Yazoo High School, had written a history of Yazoo County as a part of the county's contribution to the nation's bicentennial in 1976. The book won several awards and sold quite well both locally and regionally. In the preface to the book, the authors had pledged any profits from its sale to the library, and on 20 January 1977 they tendered a check for \$6,500 to the Board of Control.

In the meantime, David Woodburn had resigned to take a better paying job, and the Board once again decided to hire a professional librarian. On 21 July they hired Jane Smith. One of Jane's greatest contributions, according to Harriet, was to convince the Board of Control of the need to develop policies and then actually to develop them. "She tightened up the operation with those policies," Harriet recalled. "She taught us a lot of things, but we taught her a few things, too," said Harriet with a laugh. One of the "few things" they taught her was the value of running outside programs to involve the community in the library. "She caught on fast," said Harriet, "and things really began to happen" (DeCell, 1991).

Harriet's own career as librarian began in 1983 with an unexpected telephone call while she was visiting her daughter in London. The library had hired a third professional librarian after Jane Smith left, but he stayed for just a brief period before moving on to Dallas, Texas. Herman and another Board member began discussing the problem of finding a new director when they both hit on the idea of Harriet, so Herman called her in London to tell her that the Board was interested in her applying. She agreed, went through the interview process, and was duly hired, contingent upon her completing a masters degree in library science. She planned to stay as director until 1990 when she and Herman were going to both retire. However, Herman

died unexpectedly in 1987, and Harriet retired the next year when she decided to remarry and move to Jackson. In one short period the library was losing both its director and one of the major stabilizing influences in its life during the latter part of the twentieth century. Casting about for another director, Harriet, who had been commuting back and forth between Jackson and Yazoo City until a director could be found, and the Board chairman both came to the same conclusion almost simultaneously. Linda Crawford, who had been hired several years earlier to run the library-sponsored museum next door, was capable and she was planning to stay in the city. If she would be willing to go back to school -- as Harriet had -- and earn a masters degree in library science, she would be the ideal candidate. She was willing, and she was hired. Because of the importance of these two women in the life of library services in Yazoo City, their contributions are being presented in the form of professional biographies, which follow:

\* \* \*

Biography of Harriet DeCell

(UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, INFORMATION IN THIS BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH IS BASED ON AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED WITH MRS. DECELL [NOW MRS. KUYKENDALL] ON 3 NOVEMBER 1991 AT HER HOME IN JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI.)

Certain things stand out about Harriet DeCell.

Like another Mississippian, the venerable Eudora Welty, Harriet has an accent that has to be heard to be believed. Typical of the Delta of which she is a native, it has lazy R's and soft vowels which she often draws out for dramatic effect.

In the tradition of Southern folklorists, she is a past master at storytelling, a skill which was nurtured during summer story hours at the library and political cocktail parties which she, as wife of a senator, was obliged not only to attend but to be "on" for. In her roles as both wife and the administrator of an agency that relied on the good will of politicians and community leaders to survive, she had to be a scintillating conversationalist, a skill that is greatly enhanced by anecdotes. And Harriet has lots of anecdotes.

But, to the librarian looking for information on the how-to of public library administration, what really stands out about Harriet is her commitment to service, her determination to make a low-budget cooperative institution work despite the many forces that mitigate against it in a pluralistic community whose disparate parts are often pulling in opposite directions.

She is a tireless cheerleader of the public library movement. She celebrates its many virtues and victories, and, when forced to face its problems, she chooses to find

the humor in them rather than the despair. She is absolutely convinced that every problem has a solution, and, like the determined charwoman who can see the potential order and beauty in a disheveled and chaotic room, she pushes up her sleeves and sets about creating a solution.

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I first met Harriet in 1986 while a graduate student in library science at the University of Southern Mississippi. One of the assignments in the "History of the Book" class I was taking at the time was to participate in a field trip to the Ricks Memorial Library in Yazoo City. The professor of the class was being funded by a state grant to assist the library in evaluating and organizing its historic book collection; the class' project was to help the professor. The eventual plan was to develop a cultural and book arts museum which would focus attention on the early Yazoo Library Association.

As a part of the class' visit to the library, Harriet gave us a tour of the beautiful beaux art building constructed in 1901 as well as the modernistic but complimentary addition designed by her brother-in-law, John DeCell. The tour wound up in the library's main reading room, and all the students gathered around the large reading table as Harriet began explaining the history of the library association and the beautiful building that had been its home since the turn of the century. As she related the

history of the library she began weaving part of the town's history into it. I remember being amazed at the time that she knew so many details of local history and could recall them so easily. I was later to learn that she had written an award-winning history of the county, Yazoo: Its Legends and Legacies. Many of the details she related were interesting asides and anecdotes; one anecdote was developed at considerable length. This particular anecdote involved a French girl named Laure who fell in love with Jimmy Dick Hill, a Yazooan studying medicine in France in the early part of the nineteenth century. According to Laure, the two were married, and Jimmy Dick, fearing the wrath of his hard-hearted father, went back to Yazoo City ahead of her to break the news to his wealthy patriarch. According to the Hill family, there was never a marriage. But, married or not, Laure soon disembarked at the Yazoo City dock with a baby in her arms. However, her "husband" would never acknowledge her as his wife, and Laure was forced to live out her sad life on the periphery of society. As it turned out, though, Laure managed to have the last word. Writing under the name Laura Carter Holloway, Laure penned her sad story in the form of a romance called Laure, the History of a Blighted Life, in which she chronicles her misfortunes and tribulations. She offers a fitting moral to such a tale on the last page.

Reader, my sad story is drawing to a close. In the fields of romances the skillful hand of the novelist reaps only blooming flowers, and joy and happiness spring up where tears and sorrows were sown; but on the plains of destiny, where cold reality is the harvester, misery and despair are more often garnered at the harvest time, than love and hope (1869, p. 371).

Supposedly, the Hill family was so outraged by the book that they bought up all copies they could locate and destroyed them post haste. Until Harriet came along, there was not even a copy in the Ricks Library; all the information that Yazooans had on Laure was the whispered rumors that had been passed down from generation to generation. Supposedly, according to the librarian, the story was used by latter-day Yazoo matrons as a means of illustrating the fate that could befall a young girl if she were not careful with her affections. Harriet located a copy of the book on the interlibrary loan system, borrowed it, copied it, and placed it in the library's local history room. Now, all Yazooans can read Laure's story as she wrote it; there is no more need to rely on whispered rumors.

Harriet told the story with great gusto, arching her eyebrows and inflecting her voice to get the most mileage possible out of the racy parts of the tale. We all sat mesmerized as she told us about the city and about Laure and about the Ricks Memorial Library and the Association that had founded it so many years earlier. It was not until several years later when I was looking back over my notes of

that day that I realized the dynamics that Harriet had very skillfully put into operation that day. We wanted to see the library, so she decided to give us the full treatment; she even gathered us all around her feet for a story hour and held us all spellbound. We were mere children in Harriet's skillful hands.

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Harriet's own story begins in Cleveland, Mississippi, where she lived an almost storybook early life as the happy child of a respected local attorney. She was doted on by her neighbor, the organist at the First Baptist Church of Cleveland; Harriet recalls that even though she was a young child at the time her neighbor treated her as if she were an adult, inviting her over for tea and conversation and introducing her to that decidedly adult poet, Walt Whitman.

Harriet recalled that it was at her mother's dinner table that she got her first introduction to a notion she would later learn to refer to as intellectual freedom. Her sister had been assigned to read For Whom the Bell Tolls by Ernest Hemingway. However, when she went to the Cleveland Public Library to check it out, the librarian refused to let her have it, explaining that it was not appropriate reading for a young lady. This incident was reported at the dinner table, and Harriet laughed when she recalled her mother's reaction. "She rose from the dinner table and walked the four blocks to town and checked the book out and came home



and put it down on the dinner table with our dessert. She said to my sister, 'I'm sure if you've been assigned this it's all right for you to read'."

When Harriet was serving on the Board of Control of the Yazoo Library Association, she encountered something of the same problem. Someone had suggested that the notorious seventeenth century novel Fanny Hill by John Cleland be added to the collection and the librarian at the time sought Harriet's opinion. "I had never read Fanny Hill. So I read it, and I took it back to her. And I said, 'I tell you what, it's very dull after the third chapter. It's highly repetitious. But any book that has been around for more than 200 years...has historical interest...and we should have it...So she bought Fanny Hill and someone promptly stole it, and that was the end of Fanny Hill."

Though Harriet initially trained to be a teacher and worked in that profession for a number of years, she was involved with the public library almost from the beginning of her career. She attended what is now Rhodes College in Memphis and in 1949 she accepted her first professional job -- teaching math at Yazoo High School. She married Herman DeCell in 1951, taught math for five more years, "and then I retired and had three children."

Her new husband was on the library board, so Harriet had close connections with matters down at Ricks almost from the beginning of her time in Yazoo City. While she was

still at home with her three children, she became involved with the Junior Auxiliary, a local service organization for women. As a part of her responsibilities in the organization, she was asked to identify service areas in which the auxiliary could get involved. Aware of the library's desperate need for funds and for manpower, she suggested that individual volunteers could work in the library and the group as a whole could raise money to refurbish the main reading room. Not only did she get volunteers working in the library, within a year's time the group had raised \$10,000 to refurbish the main reading room.

As soon as her children were able to fend for themselves, Harriet went back to work as a substitute English and history teacher for a year. "At the end of that year, which was very hard, I bought bifocal glasses and got the Latin teacher to teach me English grammar. I was hooked on English and decided I would never go back to teaching math again." She convinced the administrators at Mississippi College to admit her to the master's program in English, even though she had no undergraduate preparation in the subject. Then she started teaching English on a regular basis. Ever the innovator, Harriet was not content just to teach English. She and one of her fellow teachers, JoAnne Pritchard, redesigned the curriculum, putting literature and history together (along with a smattering from the other arts and humanities, including music and art) into a three-

year, interdisciplinary curriculum that began with American culture in the tenth grade, moved on to English culture in the eleventh grade, and ended with world culture in the senior year. Here again, Harriet was able to involve the library in her plans. "One of the things that we decided was a goal for those students was that they would learn to use the library, because if they could learn to use the library they would educate themselves." Harriet and JoAnne worked out an agreement between the library and school administrators that allowed their students to go to the public library during the day. Moreover, the students also had assignments that took them back in the evenings. Harriet laughed when she recalled the structure of some of the assignments.

We led them through the ways that a library can be used by giving them lessons to get up. Some of the lessons were crazy things like, go down to the library and start with the 000's and look up and down the shelves until you find a book that you like. Pull it out and look at the index and look at the table of contents. Read five pages and think up two questions that you would like to know as a result of this. And then go to the 100's and do the same thing, and go to the 200's and do the same thing.

It took about four hours to get through the Dewey Decimal System this way, said Harriet, "but they knew where those books were."

Once when asked by school administrators to identify her goals as a teacher, Harriet said that "I put down that

my ultimate goal was that when these students are 40 years old they will vote intelligently." It was not the sort of thing they wanted to hear, Harriet recalled with some amusement, "because there is no way to judge it; you can't measure it." But the administrators' cool reception of Harriet's objectives didn't dissuade her. "I knew that that was what I wanted them to understand -- why political parties represent people the way they do...that sort of thing."

Later, as director of the Ricks Memorial Library, the policies and philosophies she espoused were in keeping with those from her days of teaching high school -- they were set high. While she recognized the need to respond to what people wanted to read, she also recognized that a public library's responsibility is to help people become the best they are capable of being.

I think that libraries are there to serve the people in the community. That doesn't mean that they only respond. They can certainly initiate, but, at the same time, they have to initiate things that the people want and can use. So, one of the things that I think libraries should do always is to have programs that draw out the most intellectual side of people, the most scholarly in the community.

She is quick to point out that there is nothing wrong with reading "light loves and mysteries," admitting that she does so herself on occasion. And the library should provide this material, "but this scholarly side is the side the

library should present to the community for those who would like it." Referring to the previously mentioned goals for her high school students, Harriet said with a laugh that "maybe you're 65 before you're finally an intelligent voter, but the library should lead the community in this direction -- always."

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Harriet became director of Ricks Memorial Library in 1983, and she freely admits that her idea of what it was going to be like to run the library and what it actually was like were quite different. "I had envisioned when I went down to the library that I was going to put books and people together, because, you see, I had seen the library as a patron and as a user. Even as a trustee I kept seeing the library as a user, as the person who wanted the books." But there was more to running the library than putting people and books together, Harriet soon learned. What she discovered was that the director of a library needs a masters in business administration about as much as she needs a masters in library science (M.L.S.). Directors, she said, "need to know how to make out budgets. They need to know how to go to the Board of Supervisors and understand the tax structure. They need to understand how to deal with the people they hire. They need to know how to fire somebody safely. They need to know how to write policies. They need to know how to file. That's the world of the

director." So, as much as she wanted to select new books for the library, she realized that job was best left to the persons who were running the circulation and reference desks and knew what people were interested in reading.

When Harriet took the job as director, she did not have the requisite masters degree in library science, (M.L.S.) so, while she ran the library part-time, she went back to the University of Mississippi which had an accredited library science program at the time and completed her M.L.S. Even though she was not technically equipped for the job when she first took it, she brought with her a wealth of experience from serving on the library's Board for a number of years. Her husband, Herman, had been on the Board until 1961, and when he resigned, Harriet replaced him. During her tenure on the Board, David Woodburn, the library's first professional librarian (i.e., a person with an American Library Association-accredited M.L.S.), was hired, and it was also the first time that someone from outside the immediate vicinity had been hired. The library went through two more directors after David left and each time Harriet was instrumental in drawing up the job description and developing a list of interview questions. While the job was still vacant after the third professionally accredited librarian left, Harriet decided to visit her daughter in London. While in London, Harriet was called by her husband, Herman, who told her that the Board had decided they wanted

Harriet to consider becoming the next director. Harriet said she would apply, and when she went in for the interview she found herself in the amusing situation of answering questions which she herself had written. She was hired, and she tackled the job like she had tackled everything else in her life -- with total enthusiasm. In the previous job descriptions she had drawn up she had specified that the director of Ricks Memorial Library should be a part of the community and that one of the director's jobs was to sell the library to the community. It was not a responsibility that anyone had to convince her of. She worked with her board to reach out into the community; she made speeches; and when cable television came to town she secured for the library a 30-minute weekly slot on its public service channel and started her own talk show about the library called "Ricks Looks at Books."

One of the first major problems Harriet encountered at Ricks was one of crowd control. The library was a popular place for children to visit after school, a place where they could do homework, library-based assignments, and wait for their mothers to pick them up. However, during the time there was no director, a number of high school-age youths in the community who were not in school either because they had dropped out or been expelled began coming to Ricks in droves and stirring up trouble. By the time Harriet actually arrived on the job the situation had become almost

impossible. The library only had seating for 66 people, but some days there were as many as 240 people in the library. "And some of them were there for meanness," she said. On one occasion a librarian asked a young boy to be quiet, and he responded by ripping the book in half that he was holding. On another occasion a youth was seen urinating in the stacks. The final straw for Harriet was when a group of older boys decided to gang up on a small boy who was at the library by himself. She spirited the boy to safety. She then went to the police department to tell them she was going to need help. She told her Board, "We're going to solve this problem," and she did. She established a list of rules and regulations, published them, and advised offenders that she intended to enforce them. Her approach to the problem was a bit like her approach to establishing ground rules in her classroom; it was a now-let's-get-a-few-things-straight approach. When the next unruly horde descended on the library and began ignoring the librarians' attempts to maintain order, Harriet called the police in to sweep the place of troublemakers.

To take some of the pressure off the reading rooms, Harriet set up chairs outside under the trees where children who did not need to use the library could do homework. She surveyed the youthful users, requiring those who were there for school-assigned work to fill out a form. It did not take long for a large stack of forms to accumulate, and with



this ammunition, she went to the school superintendent to request help. "We needed someone who knew those children by name and who had the disciplinary power of the school behind them," said Harriet. She convinced the superintendent to send one of the school librarians down each afternoon and pay her salary out of the school's budget. So Harriet regained control of the library. "It had become a sort of hangout," she explained. "When high-school age people discover that they can control adults, they're like dogs tearing up somebody. They had gotten that perception, and it was like they were going to tear this place up. In situations like that you just have to screw yourself down to where you've got control."

However, Harriet's tenure at the library was not consumed only with maintaining control. Her philosophy of the public library sees it as a focal point of community life, and she feels that the community's positive involvement in the library should be encouraged at every turn. It was at least partly due to her encouragement while a Board member that the library began a series of humanities lectures, a program that had historical roots in the programs sponsored by the original members of the Yazoo Library Association. Part of the new addition to the library was a community room, and Harriet made this available to any legitimate function, though she did charge a \$100 fee for such things as political rallies. It was

brought to her attention that most of the black churches in town did not have social or parish halls large enough to accommodate large wedding receptions, and while the board room at the Mississippi Chemical Corporation was open for community use, no alcohol could be served. So Harriet invited the churches to make use of the facility. "I was quoted in the Detroit Free Press as saying that the only large meeting place in town that you could have both whiskey and black people was at the community room of the library."

Harriet's philosophy of public librarianship was -- from the beginning -- one of complete openness. The ink was hardly dry on Form 440, the Health, Education, and Welfare document of the early 1960's which federally funded institutions had to sign in order to receive funds, before the Yazoo Library Board of Control had signed it. By signing the form, the Board members were declaring that the Yazoo Library Association did not discriminate on the basis of race. "We were the first institution in Yazoo County to sign," said Harriet. On the day the board was to vote on whether to sign, Harriet made sure her supporters on the Board would be at the meeting. The vote was five-to-two in favor of signing, and the chairman of the board resigned and left the room. But the deed was done. The library had led the way in establishing civil rights for Blacks in Yazoo County.

The sensitivity as well as the reality Harriet brought to the issue of race relations is tellingly revealed in the introduction she and JoAnne Pritchard wrote to their history of Yazoo County.

The attempt to explain why the Civil War happened and to evaluate the Reconstruction period in Yazoo history...were written as a catharsis. It is the special agony of us as Southerners to know that a holocaust is ours and that we can never escape it and that if we had been there we would probably have done just exactly what our ancestors did, even though we deplore it...These chapters are not intended to shock or to be controversial; they are merely a comment on the psychology of the American experience (p. viii).

The schools were desegregated in Yazoo City several years after the library, and once again Harriet and her husband were instrumental not only in bringing it about but in easing the tensions that it, of necessity, created. Harriet was, as ever, sensitive to the issues that were swirling about her. On that occasion she commented to her friend Willie Morris:

I have a consciousness that small things fit together into big puzzles, and that one is responsible for one's actions and had better be ready to accept it. You get tired of getting up every day and wondering if you're being challenged by your environment. You can live in a small town and be sorry for yourself that the world passes you by -- and suddenly you realize that the world isn't passing you by at all -- that it's all here. We've got a lot of friends in big cities, and they seem to be beating their heads against the wall all the time. That's not so true here. One individual can affect a small town. At least you can decide what you believe and stand for it. I

can remember a lot of failure. It's not too bad to try and fail. When I don't try, it bothers me deeply (Morris, 1971, pp. 53-54).

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Harriet had planned to remain as director until 1990, when she and Herman were going to both retire. However, those plans were very unexpectedly changed when Herman died in 1986. In 1988 she decided to marry John Kuykendall, a retired attorney living in Jackson who had been an acquaintance of Herman's. So she resigned her job at Ricks Memorial and moved to Jackson, though she has continued to remain involved at Ricks as an occasional volunteer on major projects. Her primary involvement in libraries now is with the Eudora Welty Public Library in Jackson where she is an active member of the Friends of the Library. She is in charge of volunteer services in the branches and is also coordinating a special project in the Mississippiana Room. She calls the project the "Lesser Lights," referring to the thousands of little known Mississippi writers who live in the shadows of such towering figures as Richard Wright, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and Tennessee Williams. The idea grew out of a similar effort she had undertaken in Yazoo County to make sure that the library had a copy of every book written by a Yazooan and to interview the living authors on her television show. She discovered that out of 12,000 people living in Yazoo City, there were 15 published

authors. However, the Lesser Lights project is a little more ambitious than just interviewing all living authors. She began the project by writing to all the public libraries in the state, asking them to suggest names of any local authors they knew and, if possible, to provide the person's address as well. Each author was then contacted directly and asked to fill out a standard biographical form and, if possible, enclose a copy of his book or books. The data sheet on each author is being converted into a one-page biography, and all the biographies are being filed in a book in the Mississippiana Room at the Eudora Welty Library. The donated books are being catalogued into the Mississippiana collection.

While the "biggies" of Mississippi literature have their own museum-style displays that one can "look at," Harriet explained, "I've created a thing you can read, which is a biography of any and every single person in the state of Mississippi who has published a book, if you can conceive of the size of that job." The books that she requested from the authors were almost always forthcoming, which created a terrible workload for the catalogers at the Eudora Welty. Harriet laughed. "Well, some of them aren't the best books in the world...but they're all free. And I said to her (the cataloger) to hang in there...when you see this (the books) as a body it becomes something different from an individual thing." The whole, according to Harriet, is greater than

the sum of the individual parts because it is a monument to what Mississippians care about, what they hold dear.

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The poet Maya Angelou (1982) is fond of asking "What is your work?" which is her way of asking, "What gives meaning to your life? What is your life really about?" Looking at Harriet DeCell's life as it was lived and is being lived, the answer, at least at the public level, seems clear. Her work is about her community, about how to make the community of which she is a part be a better place because she was there. For a while she accomplished this through teaching, but her love of books and reading and lifelong growth through individual intellectual pursuit eventually led her to the public library. It is in this time-honored institution that she has made and continues to make her own unique contribution. It is here that she has found her work.

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### Biography of Linda Crawford

(UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, INFORMATION IN THIS BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH IS BASED ON AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED WITH MS. CRAWFORD ON 4 NOVEMBER 1991 AT RICKS MEMORIAL LIBRARY IN YAZOO CITY, MISSISSIPPI.)

Linda Crawford's philosophies of life and librarianship are both summed up in one metaphor passed down from her grandmother. "The best way to catch fish is to keep your

hook in the water...whatever you're doing, keep trying and always keep your hook in the water, because the minute you take out your hook, you're lost."

The metaphor is powerful for Linda for at least two good reasons. It came from someone who is very important to her, and it uses images from a pastime she finds thoroughly enjoyable. It also tangentially touches two other areas in which she has strong professional interests: Archaeology and folklore. In fact, she recently published a book about the catfish in which she investigates the folk traditions as well as the ancient history of this humble southern food source. In the introduction to the book she includes a little of the lore from her own family when she quotes advice from her grandmother -- her favorite fishing companion -- on how to catch fish.

It was Grandma that taught me the fundamental secret of successful fishing -- keep the hook in the water.

"Too many people can't keep their hook in the water," she'd tell me. "You can't catch anything by looking at your bait."

I was grown before I realized that advice applied to more than catching fish. (Crawford, Catfish Book, 1991, p. 14)

It was no accident that Linda came to write such a book. Her first professional training was in archaeology and folklore, and it is only recently that she has entered her

newest professional arena, librarianship. The story of how she came to be director of the Ricks Memorial Library is an interesting one that has lots of twists and turns. As Linda herself says, "It doesn't make the least bit of sense."

Linda began as an archeology major at the University of Texas at Austin; her field of concentration was the Indians of the Southwest. However, her major professor told her it was almost impossible to get a job in archeology unless she were willing to adapt her skills to the needs of a museum. So Linda lost no time in going to the Texas Memorial Museum where she landed a part-time job cleaning beads. To an archeologist, working in a museum pales in comparison to actually being on a dig, but, in Linda's case, it did have one thing going for it -- a salary. To augment her job skills Linda began taking classes in museum studies.

Now, with experience working in a museum and with academic training in museumship, Linda was ready for her first real job. She was hired to start a local history museum in Staton, Texas, which was close enough to Texas Tech University to allow her to continue taking classes in museum studies. While in Staton she was offered a scholarship to do graduate studies in museumship at the State University of New York in Cooperstown. However, she discovered when she got there that between the University of Texas at Austin and Texas Tech University she had taken most of the museum studies courses that Cooperstown had to offer,



so her graduate advisor allowed her to take most of her course work in folklore, a complementary and closely related field.

As she was finishing up her degree at Cooperstown, she was offered a job at the Panhandle Plains Historical Museum, which she frankly describes as a "monstrosity of a museum." She took the job, nonetheless, and bided her time until she saw a job advertised in Yazoo City that seemed tailor made for her. The city was beginning from scratch a new museum which was to focus on folk and material culture as well as on visual arts, so in 1978 she made the move to Yazoo City.

The building that was to house the museum was the old school house, which was located next door to the Ricks Memorial Library on a triangular-shaped piece of parkland just north of Yazoo City's commercial district. Actually, the building was much more than a museum. It housed a variety of cultural organizations, including a dance studio and a community theatre that staged productions in what had been the school's auditorium. There was even a small restaurant that operated in the basement in what had originally been the school's cafeteria. Linda's job was to administer this multi-purpose building as well as to develop the museum that was to be the building's star attraction.

Because of its proximity to the library and because the library board -- at the urging of board member Harriet DeCell -- had been the prime mover behind developing the old

school (it had been built in 1902) into a museum and cultural center, there has been from the beginning a close working relationship between the two institutions. In fact, the museum's by-laws call for one member of the library board also to serve on the museum's board. This Board member's special job is to act as an official liaison between the two institutions. For many years this liaison was Harriet DeCell.

Linda had been at the museum for ten years when Harriet decided to retire from the directorship at Ricks. It was at a time when both institutions were experiencing financial difficulty. Both were funded out of the same sector of local government, and things were not exactly flush down at the City Hall and the County Courthouse. The area was poor and getting poorer as out migration cut into the population and the available tax base. It was slowly dawning on everyone concerned that there just wasn't enough money to hire to masters-level people to run the city's two main cultural institutions. In the meantime, Harriet had remarried and moved to Jackson; she was commuting until other arrangements could be made, but she wasn't interested in keeping up the pace indefinitely. The logical solution gradually became apparent to everyone -- let Linda run both institutions. She did not have a masters degree in library science, but neither had Harriet when she started. So it was agreed that Linda would be appointed director of both

institutions at a salary significantly larger than she was receiving as director of the museum but less than the combined salaries of both director positions. A part of the bargain was that she would have to go back to library school and get her masters in library science, so she took the job and began commuting to the state's only accredited library school two hours away in Hattiesburg.

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By now, Linda has been administering publicly-funded cultural organizations for 18 years, during which time she has learned that one has to go beyond the textbook in order to make things work in the real world. "I do pre-crisis management," Linda explains with a laugh. This management theory, she says, is predicated upon figuring out all the things that can go wrong and then preparing for them "because they probably will go wrong."

Another part of extra-textbook management for Linda involves realizing that small institutions are not the "best of all possible worlds, and that you can't have everything textbook correct." Sometimes, she said, "You have to choose between what's right and what's necessary."

An integral part of Linda's administrative style is the maintenance of good lines of communication. In a small town like Yazoo City communication is thrust upon one because of the social networks. "In Yazoo County, like all rural areas, everybody knows everybody intimately...they know

everything about you and your grandmother." So the communication is there. The skill of the administrator is learning how to make the existing system work for her. Part of that skill, says Linda, is recognizing that institutions such as the library are highly political because money is involved. Part of a communicator's skill in such a setting is, in Linda's words, "knowing where the bodies are buried." But it is not just knowing where they are buried; it is making sure that people with whom you have to deal know that you know where the bodies are buried. In this way there can be an unspoken acknowledgement that carries enough weight to win your point at a critical moment.

Another part of the communications formula in a setting such as Yazoo City is knowing the social connections within the community. It is important to know who goes to what church because churches "are a very powerful social force in the city." It is also, she continued, important to know who goes hunting with whom. The importance of such information is knowing who can most effectively carry your message to a person you are trying to influence. In Yazoo City a business call to someone's office is often not as productive as an unofficial contact by a person's friend at church.

The point is well illustrated by one of the city supervisors who was blocking the library's efforts to get funding for a new bookmobile. The official channels had yielded no results, so several of the supervisor's church

friends were advised of the problem. Every time he went to church someone buttonholed him about the issue until finally he came around.

Another important part of communicating, according to Linda, is listening. "You have to be open, and you have to listen. People who think they know it all don't listen to other people." The result is obvious; the person who does not listen is avoided by others and, consequently, he does not get any feedback. Without feedback, you are doomed.

Another aspect of communication is utilizing one's staff. Each person is unique, and no two persons have exactly the same social milieu. Consequently, according to Linda, it is important to listen to every member of your staff. Each person brings his or her own special perspective to bear on any question. This aspect of communications is particularly important in a county such as Yazoo that has so many dividing lines. "Yazoo County's divided into county and city, but it's also divided into hills and the delta, the farming and the industrial people, the blacks and the whites." All of these segments must be heard, and the more ears you have working for you, the more effectively you can listen.

Linda noted that communication is most effective when it is planned, and it is most effectively planned when one has collected data to make an informed judgement about with whom you should be communicating and why. She said that the

Ricks Memorial Library is very fortunate to have been the first library in the state to have an integrated online system, that is a computerized system that acts as a cataloging tool for accessioning books and other media into the collection, a public catalog, and a circulation system, among other things. One of the benefits of such a system is that you have a wealth of statistics about your service population right at your fingertips. "We have access to statistics such as who uses the library, how old they are, what race they are, what part of town they live in, (or what part of the county they live in), how much education they have. We have all of these breakdowns and more." Linda said she examines the statistics carefully and often to "see if we're reaching all segments of the community." She explained that on one occasion she discovered that the library was not reaching the pre-schooler population. "This may sound funny because, of course, pre-schoolers don't read; but they get read to." She said that when she finds a category of patron that appears to be under-utilizing the library, she starts "marketing" to that group. Sometimes she does this by simply distributing information (e.g., through speeches, pamphlets, etc.). However, she finds the most effective outreach is through getting people in the library and involved in what the library is all about. The most effective means of doing this according to Linda, is by appealing to the children who will appeal to their parents

and grandparents. She describes an older gentleman who is a non-library user. "I know he has a grandchild, and if I could ever get him to have to bring that kid in, then he'll be hooked. I have a lot of grandparents who are regular library users who got hooked when they brought their grandchildren in." Because of this, the librarian said she regularly presents programs in the public school, and much of her public relations with the larger community focus on materials that appeal to the younger set e.g., videotapes, topical books, and magazines.

Another point of appeal, said Linda, is the value the library brings to a family in a community that is as poor as Yazoo County. "There's a tremendous number of people who don't have dictionaries and encyclopedias and magazines. They can't afford them. We're the last resource for some of these people." The library's role in such a community dramatically illustrates the truth of the American Library Association poster which proclaims, "Libraries will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no libraries."

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Despite the demands of running two cultural agencies and going to graduate school (she still had two courses remaining on her masters degree in library science in 1992), Linda continues to find time to write. She has a watermelon book on the drawing boards in which she plans to examine the

folk history of another of the South's favorite foods. However, her immediate attention is being consumed by A Pre-History of the Southeast: A Layman's Guide. Most the literature in southeastern archaeology, explains Linda, is highly technical and not helpful for the layperson. There are several national archaeological guides written at the layperson's level, but their treatment of the Southeast is a bit scant, according to the librarian. Linda explained during our interview that her book will be "an attempt to explain southeastern archaeology to everyday people," the people who find arrow heads and spear points in their back yards and want to understand more about them. By now, word has gotten out about her in-progress book. "We have patrons come in all the time looking for the book," she said with a laugh. "I tell them that I'm writing as fast as I can."

What is amazing about Linda is that with her writing schedule, her graduate study schedule, and her administrative schedule at the library which sometimes includes late evening hours for board meetings and speaking engagements, she still has time for patrons who wander in and want to talk about archaeology or history or books or catfish or one of the other subjects about which she is knowledgeable. But she does have, or, rather, she makes the time. In fact, making time for such communication is not only at the heart of her administrative style, it is at the heart of her personality as well. "I came here as a



historian and an archaeologist and a folklorist, and I wanted to know things about this place and its history. I discovered that if you're open and you listen, people will tell you things; they'll tell you **anything** [Linda's emphasis]. I discovered that all that people really want is somebody to listen. That's all anybody wants -- just someone to listen."

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#### In Summary

Like most institutions, the Yazoo Library Association has been shaped and molded by the people who have cared about and nurtured it; it bears their marks and reflects their values. It is little wonder then that the Yazoo Library Association today is a venerated institution in this small Delta town. The building itself, a work of art which citizens point to with pride, is, in fact, listed as the high point on the walking tour guide of the city's historic district published by the Chamber of Commerce. (Historic District Walking Tour, n.d., p. 7). The Ricks Memorial Library stands as a tribute not only to the man in whose memory it was created, but to many others who refused to let war, pestilence, and economic hard times overwhelm the little library. For more than 150 years this institution has provided the intellectual light by which citizens ranging from pre-schoolers to retirees have pursued their various research and entertainment interests. The library

has not been just a passive member of the town's intellectual and cultural community; it has been active in sponsoring debates, political forums, literary readings and other programs designed to stimulate the highest and best instincts of the community's citizens. By being the first institution in the city to desegregate, the library provided the light of social reform as it paved the way for others to follow. Bonita Appleton, a reporter for the Jackson Clarion-Ledger summed up the situation as well as any when she noted in a 1965 article that "the B. S. Ricks Memorial Library is one of the oldest in the state and one of the newest in outlook." The Yazoo Library Association and its leadership -- both paid and voluntary -- stand in that long and noble tradition identified by librarian Lester Asheim in 2 Library Lectures:

I like to think that the appeal of librarianship... [is] its ideal of service, its importance in the fight for freedom of expression, its position of leadership and educational force in its community. To be a part of that kind of social contribution will inevitably require trouble and effort, but it is well worth it (1959, p. 24).

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

General Conclusions

Several conclusions are readily apparent from this research. First, the Yazoo Library Association was a social library as defined in the canons of American library history i.e., "a voluntary association of individuals who had contributed money toward a common fund to be used for the purchase of books" (Shera, 1949, p. 57). Second, the Yazoo Library Association was a part of a larger pattern of social library development in the South which has never been systematically chronicled. In her essay, "The Forerunners: 1818-1900," Willie D. Halsell documents 16 social libraries in Mississippi founded prior to 1860, but notes that the Yazoo Library Association was the only one to leave a record. None of the referenced libraries is listed in the Bureau of Education's Public Libraries in the United States of America, an 1874 survey that included, among other forms, social, academic, and free town libraries. No doubt, the intervening Civil War was much to blame for this decimation of the fledgling social libraries. In his essay, "Cultural Activities in the Twentieth Century," Mississippi historian Joseph C. Kieger (1973) notes that the disruption of institutional development occasioned by the Civil War

continued to bear fruit well into this century. According to Kieger, a 1927 survey of public library services in Mississippi revealed that "eighty-three percent of the total population...lacked library services" (p. 500). In the rural areas the percentage was even higher. Despite this fact, Kieger does note that some of the so-called public library services were being provided by social libraries and that as late as 1886 these libraries were still being founded in the absence of any government-funded public library system in the state. Kieger's findings are born out by Anders' (1958) study of the history of public library development in the South in which she notes that the movement did not really begin in earnest until after 1935. Third, a prosopographical (i.e., group biographical) examination of the founders and subsequent sustaining members of the Yazoo Library Association reveal them to be similar in social position, wealth, and intellectual interests to founders and members of other social libraries. The Yazoo group was composed of business leaders and members of the professions (e.g., law, medicine, the clergy), whose interests, as documented by their debates and book collection, ranged across the fields of literature, history, philosophy, and religion. As such it is not unlike the group of men who founded the Jaffrey Social Library in New Hampshire, the Charleston Library Society in South Carolina, or the Boston Athenaeum.

Haynes McMullen opens his monograph on the preconditions for social/public library development with the following statement:

When any library is founded, its establishment can usually be traced to the thoughts and actions of a few people. But behind and around these people must be an environment which encourages -- or at least permits -- the existence of libraries (1958, p. 1).

Though he was writing about library beginnings in the midwestern states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, McMullen could well have been describing the conditions that existed in Yazoo City in 1838 when the 14 founders of the Yazoo Library Association gathered at "early candlelight" for their first meeting. McMullen goes on to articulate specific conditions that were common to the founding of libraries in the Midwest up until 1850. McMullen found that recently settled areas that were enjoying good economic conditions were most likely to be the sites for the founding of new libraries. This certainly reflects the experience in Yazoo City where the library was founded in 1838, a mere eight years after the town was incorporated. He also found that enabling legislation was not a positive factor. This was also the case in Yazoo City as the legislation granting the Association a charter was not passed until two years after the library association began to function.

When it was first founded, the Yazoo Library

Association had much of the look of an athenaeum about it. Even after it was reorganized in 1871, it continued to have many of these aspects. The library's first serious move in the direction library services to the public came with the reorganization of 1890. the reasons for this move are never stated in the minutes explicitly, but there is enough evidence to suggest a plausible theory. From the beginning the Association had been interested in developing a book collection. However, the minimal fees were scarcely enough to maintain the Association's building, much less develop a respectable library collection. In an essay written in 1874 titled "Libraries in Charleston and in the Southern States," Arthur Mazyck, librarian of the Charleston, South Carolina Library Society, notes that this difficulty in finding money to fund libraries was a generalized condition all across the South in the late nineteenth century.

There are very few persons in the Southern States whose wealth is sufficient to enable them to do anything toward the endowment of public institutions...the majority of members of library societies are really unable to do more than pay a very small annual subscription (p. 890).

No doubt, Mazyck, in limiting his observation to the South, was thinking comparatively of the many Northern cities that had found generous library patrons in such persons as James Lenox and John Jacob Astor. Money was always a problem for the Yazoo Library Association as well, as one author of an

unsigned history of the library points out:

The question of finance came up for discussion again and again...Debt was dreaded with abhorrence, so we find orders to investigate the condition of the treasury before the order was given for the purchase of any lot of books...As early as 1838 [the founding date of the library association] a Committee of Ways and Means was appointed to report the condition of the treasury, its pecuniary prospect and the best method of the procurement of a library (Yazoo Library Association, p. 3).

The Minutes reveal frequent efforts at fund raising throughout the Association's history; even today, it continues to be a pressing issue. One obvious means of increasing income was to increase revenues. Since its only source of regular income (this excludes occasional donations and fund raising events) was dues and fees, the obvious answer was to increase membership. Prior to the sale of the library's building, recruitment of new members had been an effort that yielded only mixed results. With the sale of its building, the Association generated enough capital to begin developing a significant library. The library was housed in rooms provided by the city schools at no charge; this space represented an in-kind support from a local governmental agency and began a pattern of such support that was eventually to include both county and city governments. With the development of its book collection and the opening of its membership to the general white public, the library began growing at a rapid rate and took on much of the look

of a public library, including lengthy hours of operation. Today, this quasi-public institution continues to operate under its charter as a subscription library that has a contractual arrangement with the city and county governments to provide public library services to the residents of the area. As might be expected, the majority of its funding comes from governmental sources.

As a case study in institutional maturation, the Yazoo Library Association demonstrates the administrative evolution that occurs as an institution moves from the private sector into the public sector and is impacted by intervening historical events such as the professionalization of occupations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Minutes reflect the greater need for accountability as the Association moves from a totally self-administered institution to one in which administration is delegated to professional staff. Beginning with the sale of its first building and the generation of the necessary capital to establish a book collection, the library began maintaining a published schedule of hours. To accomplish this, the Association had to delegate responsibility for the library to a paid employee. With this development, there is a decided increase in detail in the Minutes as the Association begins to require the librarian to account for the library's operation. Eventually, the members of the Association come



to the realization that the body as a whole cannot provide oversight to the library and supervise the librarian; it is at this point that the Association delegates supervisory responsibility to a committee which eventually develops into what is today the Board of Control.

A case study of the library's current and recent administrators demonstrates the extent to which they have relied on proven methods of administration. A good example of this is the extent to which both DeCell and Crawford have utilized communications theory in establishing and maintaining good relations between the library and the various communities it serves.

In interviews with both DeCell and Crawford it is clear that each of the women has a good grasp of communication theory and uses it to good effect in promoting the library. The need to send out information (cognitive), the need to interact with the public (affective), and the need to involve the public in the library's work is articulated by both women, and, even though their styles are somewhat different, each, in her own way, has successfully implemented communications theory at each level. In DeCell's case, cognitive communications occurred in several ways e.g., television shows and newspaper articles. At the affective level, she was a frequent speaker in the schools and before civic groups. Such a setting allowed her not only to convey information but to receive feedback. At the

conative level, she involved, among others, the Junior Auxiliary (the group raised \$10,000 to refurbish the library and conducted story hours for children in the summer) and the school system (the superintendent provided a staff member to work with after school children in the library).

Crawford, though she is somewhat less gregarious than DeCell, has managed to maintain a high quality of communications in her role as the library's leader. Though she has continued some of the cognitive communications techniques developed by DeCell, Crawford has tended to de-emphasize them. For instance, she has not continued the television show; however, she does continue to send out news releases. Through her philosophy of "listening" she has been able to develop the affective level of communications to new heights. Particularly noteworthy is her efforts to have staff members report what they are hearing, both in the library and in their various social spheres. Finally, while she has continued to keep traditional groups involved in helping the library, she has worked very effectively on a one-to-one basis in getting individuals involved in the library's mission. Crawford's own writing (e.g., the Catfish Book) has been an effective means of generating communications at various levels. It brings people into the library who are interested in talking to her about her work, and this affective communication often leads to the conative level.

Observations:

That the social libraries of New England and, later, of the Midwest exerted a powerful influence on the development of public library services in the United States is undeniable. There were certainly more of them than there were in the South, but that was to be expected because of the larger concentrations of population in the North and Midwest and the considerably higher rates of literacy in both these areas. Nonetheless, given the structure of society and the demography of the area, social library development in the South was a significant force in the history of libraries in the United States. Further, while Shera, Ditzion, and others are able to trace the roots of New England public libraries almost exclusively to the social library movement, it is expected that an exhaustive study of the antecedents of public library development in the South will show a somewhat different pattern in which the parish library system of Thomas Bray figures rather prominently. In "Causal Factors in Public Library Development," Shera himself admits -- at least in theory -- the possibility of this.

Complex social agencies do not arise in response to a single influence; the dogma of simple causation is an easy and ever threatening fallacy. It cannot be said that the public library began on a specific date, at a certain town, as the result of a particular cause. A multiplicity of forces, accumulating over a long period of time, converged to shape this new library form (Shera, 1982, p. 12).

Shera discounts any connection between Bray, who established parish libraries throughout much of the South, and the eventual development of the system of public libraries in this country; however, this is not surprising as such a connection would have jeopardized the hegemonic role in which Shera was casting the New England social libraries. The fact of the matter is that the South has its own library history, and that history needs to be written.

#### Implications for Further Research

The existence of a social library as extensive as the Yazoo Library Association which has never been documented in the national literature of library history suggests that a much more thorough inventory of Southern social libraries needs to be undertaken. Histories of these individual libraries need to be researched and written, and these individual histories need to be synthesized into a history that will put the development of Southern libraries into perspective.

In his Library History, James Olle (1979) bemoans the absence of good biographies of librarians. "Biographies of librarians do exist, but they are quite unpopular," says Olle, (1979, p. 62), who goes on to note that biographies about librarians do not much appeal to the public because the public has a very poor understanding of what librarians do. Consequently, biographies of librarians are often nothing more than "obligatory memorials." In her work,

Catherine Mitchell (1990) cites the need of compensatory biographies (i.e., documentary narratives that prove that individual librarians did exist and that their contributions were important) as a necessary first step in rewriting American history to rewriting history so that categories of persons who have been categorically excluded can be included.

The message, then, is clear; if librarians are to be represented in social and cultural history, they must first find a biographical existence. Olle notes that Casanova "ended his days in dreary respectability as the librarian of a Bohemian nobleman" (Olle, 1979, p. 62), but it is his youthful exploits that have earned him a place in history. Olle is using an extreme example to give his point a humorous twist; as a librarian, Casanova may not have been worthy of a biography. However, Olle's point is well taken; American history is sprinkled with prominent figures who have had significant impact as librarians but have been remembered for some other achievement. Benjamin Franklin had a powerful impact on public library development but is remembered primarily as a statesman and scientist. Franklin himself was quite pleased with his accomplishment as founder of the nation's first social library, noting that

This was the mother of all the North American subscription libraries, now so numerous. It is become a great thing in itself, and continually increasing. These libraries have improved the

general conversation of Americans, made the common tradesmen and farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen from other countries...(Franklin, 1956, p. 93).

However, except for essays in library history volumes, Franklin's accomplishments as a trailblazer for the public library movement are generally ignored. The coverage of his library work is so insignificant in most general biographies that it is not even listed in the index. Arna Bontemps is remembered primarily as a novelist, historian, and writer of children's books. However, his work as an archivist and manuscript curator while head of the library at Fisk University may have actually provided his most enduring impact. During the 1940's and 1950's he began systematically collecting materials of the black literati (e.g., James Weldon Johnson, Jean Toomer, etc.) at a time when such materials were being scattered. Through his efforts, Fisk University library today has one of the nation's premiere collections of original source materials on the Harlem Renaissance, "making the Fisk University library an essential resource for the study of Afro-American life and culture" (Jones 1987, p. 19). Likewise, though he is renowned throughout the world for his fiction, it is a well kept secret even in library circles that Jorge Luis Borges was a distinguished librarian, serving for a number of years as the head of the Argentine National Library. Virginia Gray Vining is nationally renowned as the author of

award-winning children's books and as the post-World War II tutor to the Crown Prince of Japan. However, as she documents in her autobiography, Quiet Pilgrimage, her original choice was to be a librarian, and she spent a number of years working in this field, including several memorable ones as a cataloger at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She credits this work with having a powerful influence on the eventual shape of her literary life. Many other subjects are worthy of biographies, including the late Virginia Lacy Jones, the late dean of the Atlanta University School of Library Studies who was the first black woman to head the American Library Association as well as the first black woman to receive a doctorate in library science (University of Chicago, 1945).

In addition to developing biographies for historical purposes, there is a need to develop professional biographies for the purpose of administrative case studies. The systematic development of such professional biographies would have a positive experience on the curriculum of professional schools such as schools of library science. The process of researching and writing a professional biography allows the biographer to learn how professionals working in the field have actually applied theoretical principles of their discipline. Professional biographies also serve as excellent vehicles for bringing real-life experiences into the classroom.

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Research such as this has at least two purposes: to introduce significant new information into the literature of a profession or a discipline and to suggest new directions for future research. Inherent in the second purpose is the notion that the current research will in some way inform or provide direction for the research that it inspires. It is the fervent hope of this writer that future scholars in search of research topics will turn to the study of libraries and librarians. As long as the story of Southern library development remains untold, as long as the contributions of library founders such as Thomas Bray remain underacknowledged, as long as the biographies of women such as Virginia Lacy Jones remain unwritten, our job remains unfinished.

Edward G. Holley, the unofficial dean of American library historians, makes the point very well in his "Foreword" to American Library History: A Comprehensive Guide to the Literature:

...if we congratulate ourselves on the progress of library history, we also note how far we have to go. As gender studies and women's studies have become more prominent, we cannot help noting the absence of substantive works on biographies of women librarians. This writer checked the biographical section in vain for essays on women librarians in land-grant colleges and universities for one of his students. Alas, at this point in our history, the essays don't exist. Such an absence should be seen not as a cause for despair, but as a gap that both senior and junior



historians should fill before the next edition of American Library History makes its appearance (Davis & Tucker, 1989, pp. ix-x).

After reading the history of the Yazoo Library Association, one might be prompted to ask, "So What? Why is the story of a small library in an impoverished little town worth telling?" The answer, it seems to me, is simple. This little library is a part of our culture. In its own way it is as important a part of our culture as the New York Public Library or the Boston Public Library or any of the other towering edifices in library history. Its story is a microcosm of the history of this nation, reflecting the same struggles and triumphs, the defeats and victories that have been played out on our larger national stage. As such, it is an important vehicle for understanding who we are as a people and how we have arrived at this point in our history. It is a powerful story, one that needs to be told -- and heard.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

In the preparation of this manuscript the author has had the benefit of a number of excellent sources that were easily accessible both physically and intellectually. Though many materials were used, a few sources stand out as being truly exceptional.

First is the Minutes books of the Yazoo Library Association. The books, which continue to be maintained today as the ongoing record of the Association, were initiated with the Association's first meeting in 1838. Each meeting has an entry, and many canceled meetings are also noted. Though the entries vary in legibility, detail, and flair with the recording secretaries, each one is decipherable and errors appear to be relatively few. The original Minutes books are kept in the office of the director of the Ricks Memorial Library and can be viewed by appointment. However, microfilm copies of the books are available in the reference department of the Ricks Memorial Library and at the Mississippi State Archives in Jackson. To date no transcription of the original hand-written Minutes has been undertaken.

Another excellent source is Yazoo: Its Legends and Legacies by Harriet DeCell and JoAnne Prichard.

Exhaustively researched and imaginatively rendered, this 515-page book covers Yazoo County from its prehistory to Reconstruction. Heavily footnoted, the book has a detailed and accurate index and a wealth of appendices covering everything from photographic reproductions of the original plats of Yazoo City to an analysis of the census for various different years. Where appropriate, the authors have interpreted their material and juxtaposed conflicting accounts of the same events. The book was richly deserving of its awards, which include Best Book of 1976 from the Mississippi Historical Society and the Certificate of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History.

Jesse H. Shera's Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855 and Sidney Ditzion's Arsenals of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle States from 1850 to 1900 are absolutely basic to anyone undertaking a study of public librarianship, even if they are only regional studies. Ditzion's work is particularly good for its examination of the contributions of such philanthropists as the Carnegies and the Astors. Though he tends to iconoclasm, Michael Harris' work provides a valuable counterpoint to those who lean more toward the "great man" theories of history; Harris finds everyone's motives suspect.

Both Arthur P. Young's American Library History: A

Bibliography of Dissertations and Theses and American Library History: A Comprehensive Guide to the Literature by Donald G. Davis, Jr. and John Mark Tucker were invaluable aids in locating literature on the subject. However, the failure of the latter to identify several published items about the Yazoo Library Association was disappointing and makes one wonder how "comprehensive" it really is.

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